



Existence and the Fall

Spiritual Anthropology of Islam

Hamid Parsania

Translated and annotated by Shuja Ali Mirza

This book speaks of the world and heavens from and in which the Fall takes place. By taking into consideration the pivotal role of sin and rebellion against heaven, this work surveys the historical facets of the Fall, tracing its various stages – from the divine heavens to its entry into the mythical realms – until its final station and the appearance of the modern world.

The study continues by expounding the various interpretations of man and the universe in the stages of the Fall and culminates by addressing the plight of contemporary man and the difficulties of the modern anthropological perspective.

Hamid Parsania is an Iranian cleric with tens of books and articles to his credit on such subjects as philosophy and mysticism. He is currently the chancellor of the Baqir al-'Ulum University in Qom.

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Translator's Preface

The crisis of the modern world is hardly a matter for dispute. It is abundantly clear that mankind is at a critical juncture—a point of extreme danger and difficulty—similar to the transition point in the progress of a disease where it is not known whether the outcome will be recovery or death. Modern man's ignorance of the problem does not resolve it; rather it exacerbates and compounds both the causes and symptoms of the crisis, accelerating its progress to a deadly velocity. For while on the one hand, the profound lack of awareness that today's man exhibits with respect to his predicament gives evidence to the extent and magnitude of the problem. On the other, it points to the root causes which have resulted in such an unstable and hazardous human condition, and consequently—and somewhat paradoxically—to a possible solution.

If modern man no longer asks himself, other than in a materialistic way, about his origin, his present situation, and his future destination¹—as a countless number of his predecessors did—he misunderstands the human situation and even, in a manner, forfeits an essential part of his humanity. To be truly human requires him to think, apply his intellect, and understand his own self in an essential, substantive manner. Understanding himself fully means apprehending his origin, life and destination—or to say the same thing—to come to know reality as such. A lack of understanding then, results in a loosening of his grip over reality and, in its extreme form, this ignorance ushers him into a world which is relative, irrelevant and ultimately meaningless. He finds himself disoriented, alienated from anything and everything, and in a disabling ambivalence with regards to reality. This ambivalence began with forgetfulness and oblivion of the self and ends in profound delusion, nihilism and utter oblivion itself. Hence in our time, more than in any previous age, the Socratic imperative "Know thyself", itself the echo of the perennial message of all religions, becomes indispensable as an antidote and as the beginning of a cure.

This present work takes as its point of departure the origin of man and traces, in a "historical" fashion, his movement away from that origin. It concludes with the arrival of man on the material plane of existence and his accelerating descent into the modern world. By lucidly describing this journey and the symptoms and underlying causes of the present quagmire, it suggests a solution and a general course of action to be taken. This resolution of the current crisis and discord corresponds to man's return to his origin and the ascent towards his final destination and goal. On the individual level, it means to embark upon the spiritual journey towards God, a journey that includes self-knowledge and self-purification. On the social plane, it means to cultivate a society that accords with Divine Guidance and conforms to Divine Law and which provides an environment that attracts, nourishes and sustains its inhabitants on a path of spiritual wayfaring.

The original Persian title of this book, "*Hastī wa Hubūl*", might also have been rendered as "Being and Descent". I chose "Existence and the Fall" for two reasons. The concept of the Fall is a universal concept found in all true religions and orthodoxies. As a universal idea it is a single concept, but one that is expressed in different ways depending on the context and people for whom it is meant. Hence, though in certain traditions the emphasis might be on specific facets of the idea, this does not, at least in principle, exclude the other aspects. In the Christian tradition—the one which is usually more familiar to English readers—the emphasis is more on the moral dimension of the Fall than on the metaphysical or ontological dimension. This means that the word "Fall" or "fall of man" is usually accompanied by such expressions as "fall from grace", "loss of innocence" and "original sin". In the Islamic tradition, on the other hand, the moral dimension plays a secondary role and the fall is seen either as simply a departure from heaven or as a descent from the divine realm to this mundane one. Where the moral dimension is mentioned, in keeping with the genius of Islam and its doctrine of *tawḥīd*, it is always with reference to and as a consequence of the greater ontological or *wujūdī* picture of reality. It was my feeling that

the English reader would find it easier to understand the word "Fall", while keeping in mind its different nuance and usage in Islamic literature, than to try to grasp a new and unfamiliar term created just for the occasion of this translation.

The choice of the word "existence" over "being" can initially be explained by recourse to the etymology of the word. The word "existence" comes from the Latin *existere* or *existere*, which is itself composed of the prefix *ex* meaning "out of" and the verb *sistere* or *stare* meaning "to cause to stand, to stand". Hence *existere* literally means to "to stand out, emerge". As a variant of *esse* it often has the nuance (suggested by *ex-*) of "coming into being"² or "coming out of being". In this latter sense *existere* can be explained as the "production of relative being" and as a "falling out of" independent, self-standing and self-subsisting absolute Being.³ Existence then seems to imply the act of creation and origination and in consequence, existents, the created beings, are seen to stand out and apart from absolute Being—because they are relative—and to stand out from one another in otherness and distinction—because they are limited. The quintessential point to remember—one which resolves the multiplicity of existents by referring it to its originating principle and the One—is that existents do not stand out from being as being, but rather they constitute ("stand together" etymologically) it. This dual nature of existents, where they are both other than their origin of descent and also identified with it, is equivalent to saying that the entire universe of worlds is at once He and not-He (*huwa lā huwa*). The God manifested in forms is at once Himself and other than Himself; the *coincidentia oppositorum*.

As man "stands out", seeking independence, he actually falls towards nothingness and away from his origin and principle—distancing himself and becoming more relative and limited. Hence existence includes and prefigures the idea of the fall. Man's return is to "sit in", as it were, and to go towards his origin, root, and aspect of being *qua* being. This inward or esoteric tendency is to know, in a direct fashion, the reality of man and the world; to envision with the "eye of the heart" the created nature of things; to see that any thing is

nothing in itself and that it is something only by virtue of its bond and connection with its origin; and finally, to see in created things the infinite faces, names and attributes of the Creator.

On the moral plane, this wish of man to “stand out” is to be rebellious—to try to be a god in his own “right”. On this same plane, to accept the created nature of man and to accept to be a servant and slave of God is to try to give God something of what is His right and due and to become saintly and God-like. It is for this very reason that one of the greatest and most prestigious titles of the Prophet Muḥammad, upon him and his Progeny be Peace, is ‘*abd Allāh*’ or “slave of God”. For the greater the awareness of man’s essential slavery, the nearer he comes to the Divine Presence. Hence Islam, as the final religion, while esoterically recognizing and assenting to the theomorphic nature of man, with just as much force, asserts his servanthood and his absolute need for exoteric rites and rituals to express and realize this servanthood. To accept one without the other is to do great disservice to God’s wish to be known *in actu*. For it is the servant of God who—in realizing the Divine Names manifesting in himself and his essential poverty with regards to them—is able to love, desire, know and worship God with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his mind, and with all his strength.

* * *

Some points need to be mentioned about this translation that distinguish it from most other translations. The author, Ḥujjat al-Islām wa al-Muslimīn Pārsāniā, has been my teacher in the intellectual sciences for over ten years and I have studied most of the important texts of Islamic philosophy and some of Western philosophy with him in this period. The present book, in its nascent form, was taught by the author to a small group of mainly foreign students, including myself, nine years ago in Qum. The notes that I kept from that class helped to clarify many ambiguities. Then in June and July of 2001, I had the privilege of spending some time with the author during his

stay in Manchester, England, where he was re-writing the book in its present form. My informal discussions with him at that time were also beneficial in clarifying certain points. I began the translation immediately after that stay. Since then I have been in constant touch with him regarding all matters of the translation.

I would like to acknowledge with gratitude here the teaching, help, and advice that I received from a number of people. I wish to first thank Ustādh Camel Xerri for having nurtured in me the insight and vision necessary to understand the subject matter of this book, and for his incisive comments on parts of the translation. I am especially grateful to Irshaad Hussain and Faisal Haq Shaheen, who proofread the entire manuscript. I incorporated almost all of Br. Irshaad's corrections in the final version and would like to commend him on his attention to detail and experienced editing. Ali Owaisi and Sayyid 'Alī Qūlī Qarā'ī also reviewed the first part of the manuscript and gave suggestions that were instrumental in deciding the policy and tone adopted in the remainder of the translation. Deserving particular mention here are Dr. M.J. Elmi, the Principal of the Islamic College for Advanced Studies, London, who concretely proposed and backed this translation from its inception, and Hamid Tehrani, ICAS Press Director, who saw it to its finish. I thank them and all those who have gone unmentioned here for giving their time and energy to this endeavour. Last but not least, I wish to thank Āqā Pārsāniā for his generosity and patience, the extent of which has afforded me the opportunity to learn a great deal from him over the years—through both formal study and, perhaps more importantly, the personal example that he has set for me in the manner of his own teachers and the great scholars of the Islamic tradition.

Shujā' 'Alī Mīrā

Qum, 23 Ramaḍān, 1426/Nov. 6, 2005

Chapter 1 – Introductory

I. Unitive Anthropology¹

This book, in expanding upon the ontological and epistemological dimensions of the Fall, speaks of the worlds and heavens from which and in which the Fall takes place. By taking into consideration the pivotal role of sin and rebellion against heaven, the work surveys the historical facets of the Fall. It traces its various stages—starting from the divine heavens to the entry into the mythical and imaginal realms, until its final terrestrial station and the appearance of the modern world. The study continues by expounding the various interpretations of man and the universe in the stages of the Fall and culminates by addressing the plight of contemporary man and the difficulties of the modern anthropological perspective.

This work exemplifies a classical exposition on religious anthropology and as such, it borrows heavily from and is firmly based in the philosophical and mystical tradition of Islam. It presents itself as a viable alternative and rich substitute to modern philosophical and scientific⁴ anthropology.

The ontological foundation of this type of anthropology, which looks upon man and the universe in unitive or *tawhīdī*¹ terms, relies upon Revelation and the intellect as two sources of its cognitive content and defines man as the vicegerent of God in the world. The relationship between unitive anthropology and its ontological and epistemological bases can be illustrated in the following manner:

Anthropology	Epistemology	Ontology
Divine Vicegerent	Revelation and Intellect	Monotheism or <i>Tawhīd</i>

¹ See endnote 4 on the meaning and use of the word “anthropology” in this work.

II. Scientific Anthropology

Anthropology in the twentieth century, with its various currents in the cultural and physical fields, draws upon two major epistemological domains. The first is the perspective of the positivist school and the second relates to non-positivist philosophies. The positivist current is rooted in the empiricist and sensationalist philosophies of the 17th and 18th centuries and is the direct successor of experimental science of the nineteenth century. Some of the strains of anthropology that developed in this positivist backdrop consider themselves to be the outcome of the entry of science into the realm of human life. This trend, taking advantage of the authority of science and its newfound social and cultural allure, sees man's fall as little more than his tumbling down from the trees.

Lamarck and Darwin theorized that the animal that had fallen from the trees underwent a remarkable transformation through spontaneous or gradual evolution and was then able to stand erect. This two-legged animal eventually came to make tools with his hands and communicate with his larynx.

What we have termed as "scientific" anthropology here, often tended to use such theories as have been mentioned to reduce human civilization and culture to the two modalities referred to above—namely, tool-making or technology and communication or linguistics. Chimerical hypotheses of the monkey who became a titan were introduced as bona fide scientific theories and helped to entrench and propagate this new paradigm.ⁱ These superstitions in reality helped to displace the idea of the spiritual decline of man with the theory of his material evolution and worldly progress.

The theories that were put forward by this movement were based upon numerous speculations and many missing links that science could never prove. The idea of "progress" in conjunction with the theory of evolution covered up this innate weakness by playing upon modern man's newfound attachment and fascination with nature and his oblivious disregard

ⁱ M. Ilin and E. Segal, *How Man Became a Giant* (New York: J.B.Lippincott Company, 1942).

for the other dimensions and states of being. The result was a purely terrestrial portrait depicting man and human life as wholly scientific. Other pictures—like those revealed by the prophets and sages in the past—were painted in less glamorous colours, and were termed imaginary, non-scientific and invalid. Hence in this positivist anthropological perspective, man became a purely natural being—like other creatures of the natural world—with this particularity that he was able to make tools and communicate using symbols and language.

The following table shows the relationship of scientific anthropology with epistemology and ontology:

Anthropology	Epistemology	Ontology
Tool-Making Animal, <i>homo faber</i>	Empiricism and Sensationalism	Materialism

III. Contemporary Philosophical Anthropology

Philosophical discussions on the theory of knowledge in the twentieth century revealed a great deal about the reality of experimental knowledge and science, leading to a crisis in positivist circles. This in turn led to the advent of a branch of anthropology—under the name “philosophical anthropology”—which was based on different and alternative currents of philosophical thought.

Philosophical anthropology was rooted in philosophies such as the phenomenology of Kant⁶ and Husserl⁷, or the existentialism of Kierkegaard⁸ and Nietzsche⁹. The common element between these philosophies was their awareness of the limitations of modern science and its impotence with regards to resolving the fundamental questions of life.

Empiricists and scientists were captivated with the natural world and in many instances were only concerned with the domination and control of what they studied. They lined up man alongside other natural phenomena and made him the object of a study and an instrumental knowledge that was characterized primarily by his biological dimension. The existentialists and phenomenologists on the other hand focused on

issues of human life and culture. The conceptual and theoretical approach of these latter two to the subject of man, under the name of philosophical anthropology, was similar to that of classical philosophy and pre-modern anthropologies in that it did not limit itself to experimental science. This said, philosophical anthropology has a special characteristic that distinguishes it from pre-modern anthropologies.

This type of anthropology, in spite of its awareness of the epistemological quandary of modern science, itself fell victim to an absence of cognitive content and stability and tended towards what might be called a "cognitive anarchy". Terms such as "relativity of knowledge", subjectivism, relativity of truth or scepticism point to the precarious situation of knowledge and cognitive significance in this epistemological trend. To follow this path is to end up, ontologically speaking, in a sophism that denies concrete reality and which presents an anthropology or science of man that is ultimately nihilistic, or culminates in a humanism that sees man as a *homo faber*—an animal that creates his own culture and makes his own terms and meanings.

In a world that is devoid of truth and reality or, to say much the same thing, finds no standard or measure for it, man becomes the reality and measure of all things. Contemporary philosophical anthropology sees truth and reality to be a human contrivance which is "produced" within the context of culture and society—expressed through art and literature—and is changed and re-changed there, and even annihilated. This type of anthropology emphasizes that aspect of *homo faber*, or the "making animal", which deals more with the creation of meaning and symbols, whereas its positivist counterpart stresses technique and the making of tools.

The "finding" and discovery of truth or the seeking of it and arriving at it is a common factor of traditional anthropologies. Even scientific anthropology, at least on the physical and biological level, chased the fleeting shadows of truth and claimed to have reached it. Contemporary philosophical anthropology on the other hand, especially when it enters the post-modern period and when it does not outright deny con-

crete reality, paints truth and reality in phenomenological colours, putting them in "brackets" or in limbo and labelling them as unattainable.¹⁰

The epistemological and ontological aspects of contemporary philosophical anthropology can be summarized as follows:

Anthropology	Epistemology	Ontology
Culture-making Animal	Relativity of Perception and Truth	Nihilism

IV. Classical Philosophical Anthropology

From what has already been covered only a step remains to clarify the difference between contemporary and classical philosophical anthropology. Classical philosophical anthropology, which actually predates scientific anthropology, is given neither to scepticism nor to a negating sophism. Moreover, it does not limit itself to experience and the empirical and does not follow the dictates of nineteenth century materialism. At its lowest level it is connected with the rationalist philosophies of the 17th and 18th centuries. These philosophies sought after the essence and reality of man amongst his concepts and innate ideas.

At the intermediate level this type of anthropology is related to intellectualist philosophies that go beyond particulars and conceptual rationality and deal with universal concepts and intellects. From the perspective of this level, man is seen as an angel who has fallen from the intelligible world, and until he can once again return to his original abode, he is able to find no rest.

I was an angel, the highest heavens were my abode;
Adam brought me to this cloister and city of ruin.ⁱ

ⁱ From the *Diwān* of Ḥāfiẓ, ghazal 317.

The definition of man as the "rational animal", or *homo sapiens*, pertains to this level of classical-philosophical anthropology. For what is meant by "rational" here is the ability to perceive universals and rational meanings.¹

On its highest level, philosophical anthropology surpasses intellectual realities and by a recourse to Divine Grace and the Holy Spirit begins to speak of the theophanic beauty of the world. In such a case, the different aspects of *tawhīd* are revealed to man and coming to know himself, he embarks upon a true "anthropology" that is religious in nature. This "anthropology", which will be called "*tawhīdī*" anthropology in this work, envisions man in such a way that he can be referred to as the "vicegerent of God" (*khalīfat Allah*).

Tawhīdī anthropology becomes possible when intellectual knowledge is raised to its transcendental limits, presiding at the higher reaches of being. At such levels, this anthropology is animated by nothing short of inspirational knowledge and Revelation. But if, on the other hand, intellectual knowledge is limited to the level of concepts and discursive thought, it forfeits its religious capacities and ends up in a kind of dry idealism.

Classical philosophical anthropology in the modern era declined to the level of rational knowledge and took up an idealist ontology.

Anthropology	Epistemology	Ontology
Rational Animal	Rationalism	Idealism

V. Mythological Anthropology

There is no mention in mythological anthropology of the different levels of intellect. It disregards the Holy Spirit, the sacred intellect and even the metaphysical intellect in some manner, while giving predominance to fantasy and imagination. In this way it is similar to contemporary philosophical

¹ Ernst Cassirer, *An Essay on Man: An Introduction to a Philosophy of Human Culture* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1944), 52.

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anthropology and perhaps this is the reason why contemporary anthropology gives myths special attention and even attempts to reduce all religion to this level.

Despite all the similarities, there is a distinction between the two anthropologies mentioned above. Mythological anthropology, having cut its relation with the One and having turned its back upon the guidance of the intellect, has kept a limited link with some of the higher levels of reality and the imaginal world. While there is no mention in this anthropology of certainty, there is also no room in it for unmitigated doubt. Concrete existence has not been put into limbo by mythological anthropology and what is portrayed by it as reality, is actually considered as such. The man who lives the mythic life never fully cuts his ties with the heavens and hence justifies and explains his personal preferences in terms of the gods and goddesses of myth who live on higher planes. In contemporary anthropology on the other hand, the gods themselves come down to the level of human will and choice.

Contemporary philosophical anthropology can also be considered to be the full-fledged and developed version of mythological anthropology. To explain, in the mythological worldview, the acts and characters of men here took on imaginal forms up there, but in contemporary philosophical anthropology that which man had conjured up on the mythic stage and level comes back to haunt him and he is obliged to believe as real the naked figments of his fantasy.

The following chart shows mythological anthropology along with its corresponding ontology and epistemology:

Anthropology	Epistemology	Ontology
Mythical Creature	Imagination and Apparitions from the Isthmus	Lords of Species, Polytheism

VI. Dimensions of the Fall

Contemporary philosophical anthropology does not have the capacity to speak of a "fall" because it does not accept any

reality beyond man himself—so there can be no talk of a fall from, or ascent to, that reality. In the mythological view of things and due to the levels of existence that it considers, there is mention of war with the gods and an escape or exile from their presence. For contemporary philosophical anthropology though, even this latter is not a possibility.

Scientific anthropology also cannot speak of a “fall”. This is because it reduces all reality to the natural and material level. The idea of the Fall can only be spoken of where there is attention paid to existence in its totality and to the multiple states of being. Such a point of view has its roots in religion.

Now in classical philosophy, where there is talk of the totality of existence and the laws of metaphysics, a certain type of “fall” is envisioned. For instance, Plato saw man’s appearance in this world to be the result of his falling from the intelligible world of the forms. In Peripatetic Islamic philosophy there are similar references to a type of fall for man. Avicenna, in the first verse of his poem *‘Ayniyyah*, writes of the fall of the soul of man.

Classical philosophy, at least in its lower levels, came to disregard the ontological and metaphysical dimension and in consequence lost the faculty of intuition, sufficing itself with only the conceptual. As a result nothing remained of “existence” but a concept that was derived from particulars and was applied to only the quiddities of things. When existence becomes a universal mental concept, the source of change and transformation in existence is sought for on the “horizontal” plane of events and phenomena that are purely terrestrial and historical, instead of being traced to the “vertical” hierarchy of existence.

The modern world received its first impetus from the lowest levels of classical philosophy. This philosophy, which in the 17th and 18th centuries went by the names of rationalism and intellectualism, was devoid of a transcendental element. The classical philosophers from Descartes onwards were oblivious to the totality of existence and their discussions increasingly revolved around mental and rational concepts. It is for the same reason that there is no trace of the idea of the Fall

in their works. Even Hegel who paid special attention to the forces of historical change in humanity, instead of searching for the causes of these changes amongst the multiple states of being, traced them all back to phenomena existing within the temporal plane and within time.

VII. Ascent and Rise

The Fall is by no means tantamount to a denial of human ascent and evolution. Instead it puts evolution into a proper perspective. It is only with reference to the Fall that many significant human ideas gain meaning—ideas such as: anxiety, depression, alienation, effort, hope, promise, responsibility, and their like. The idea of the rise and ascent of man, in any school of thought, only becomes meaningful in light of the idea of his fall and descent. Those schools of thought which see the starting point of the Fall to be the Divine Presence, see man's ascent as ending in sainthood and the vicegerency of God. Those others which suppose that man fell from the intelligible world of the ideas, see his return as a homecoming to that same world. In their view, man returns to the lord of the species and the many gods of the pantheon.

Because scientific anthropology speaks of man's progress and evolution without reference to his fall, it fails to correctly understand where man's perfection lies and is unable to speak with any real authority on deeper human ideas.

Contemporary philosophical anthropology's awareness of the difficulties faced by modern science in substantiating the theory of evolution led it to doubt all that the moderns—in their oblivion of the Fall—had described as progress and a historical imperative. This prepared the ground for post-modern thought. Post-modern ideas are rooted in contemporary philosophical anthropology and accept the idea of cultural relativity. As a result, they not only do not see the issue of the fall or ascent of man as substantive, but they also deny the story of man's historical evolution. They see it rather as a cultural phenomena which is produced by humanity and hence can be destroyed by it.

VIII. History of the Fall

This work is the result of over ten years of lecturing at the School for Social Studies in the University of Tehran. The students of the course were undergraduates and hence an attempt was made to keep specialized terminology to a minimum while at the same time elucidating the epistemological and ontological principles of the Fall in an easy, fluent manner without recourse to philosophical proofs and mystical terminology.

The first chapter, which this section constitutes the last part of, presented some introductory points. The second chapter, entitled "Unseen and Visible", covers the general topography and stages of the Fall.

The two following chapters, called "Descent and Manifestation" and "Ascent and Felicity" explain the reality of the descent and ascent of man—delineating the two arcs through which the fall of man and his return take place. Chapter five, called "Love and Passion", speaks of man's true home and abode and of what he truly loves. In this chapter various interpretations of "love" are put forward and discussed.

The sixth chapter traces the fall of man from his existential origin and details the path that he has followed. It explains how, after man was created from dust, he was inspired by God's Spirit and became the holder of the Divine Names. At this point he would hear God's words and would converse with the angels. Sin and rebellion then caused his fall to a world which "appeared" out of his false sense of self. Man's return to the realm from which he has been expelled is only possible by way of a "self" annihilation and the destruction of his false self. In this sixth chapter entitled, "Mythological Fall", greater attention is paid to the very first step of the Fall and its myths and the polytheistic apparitions of gods and goddesses.

While the Fall has a spiritual and metaphysical reality, it nonetheless takes place through time and space and hence takes on historical and geographical aspects, and is correspondingly seen by men in the same way. During these various historical phases of the Fall, the picture that man has of him-

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self and the world is in accord with his historical and social situation. Over the course of time this picture goes through a decline and passes from higher stages to lower ones. The seventh chapter, called "Alienation", applies itself to the world that modern man has constructed for himself.

The initial chapters of this book set out the fundamentals of the Fall. The two last chapters, that is chapters six and seven, cover the historical manifestations of the spiritual and heavenly fall and explain its terrestrial topography—from the mythological times to the current period which makes claims of complete demythologization.

Chapter 2 – Unseen and Visible

I. Realms of Knowledge

Man is not separate from the world, nor is the world apart from man. Man subsists in the very substance of the world and the world manifests itself in, and through man—expounding itself through his speech.

This bond and unity between man and the universe implies that the awareness and knowledge of the two are not separate and distinct from each other. He who in some fashion apprehends the world—synthetically and in harmony with man—comes to know man to the degree of his awareness of the world. From these preliminaries, the bond and concord between anthropology and ontology becomes evident. Since ontology and anthropology are but two fields of knowledge, a bond exists between them and between this connecting principle of knowledge and man's modality of cognition. This means that the ontological and anthropological perspectives of every man arise from the limits and scope of his understanding and knowledge. Likewise, his level of knowledge is proportionate to his awareness of man and the world.

Now, because every soul arrives at a harmonious understanding of man and the world according to the level of its awareness, and conversely, its apprehension is also in line with its understanding of man and existence, it can be concluded that there is a concordance (*tawāzun*) between epistemology, anthropology and ontology. So, the person that is afflicted with doubt and scepticism in the realm of knowledge and awareness becomes a nihilist vis-à-vis his ontological perspective, and a humanist in his dealings with the phenomena of man.

The person given to sensory knowledge and awareness, on the other hand, thinking that the senses and experimentation are the exclusive means of attaining knowledge, finds himself left with a world that is entirely material. In this case, it is only natural that his anthropological perspective should gain

validity and recognition only after it, like other material phenomena, is made empirical". Now the person who depends on the "researches of his mind" and with a rationalistic outlook regards rational processes as the only means of attaining knowledge, attempts—like Descartes¹²—to prove the existence of man himself by way of rational thought, and denies—like Hegel¹³—ontological reality and existence to all that does not measure up to the standards of rational thought.

Those who live in a world of myths are predisposed to speak, in their knowledge of being, of masters of species (*arbāb al-anwā'*) and a multitude of gods and goddesses. Their picture of man is likewise mythical. In a mythical understanding, the senses and reason do not play a major role and, in their stead, it is human desires, accompanied by imagination and fantasy, which receive emphasis. In this type of knowing, it is possible to perceive certain forms and visions of the intermediate and imaginal world, though these are only the preliminary stages in the hierarchy of intuitive and spiritual understanding.

Intuitive knowledgeⁱ and spiritual understanding, when not limited to provisional glimpses of the imaginal world, and after having acquired a supra-rational and intellectual dimension, call for a different type of ontological and anthropological perspective than what has so far been covered. From this perspective, man—in his body, soul and spirit—and the world—in its entirety, become the signs and words of God Almighty.

The highest kind of intuitive knowledge is Divine Revelation. Revealed knowledge, unlike its mythical counterpart, is not anti-rational. Moreover, it neither ignores nor rejects outright sensory and experiential forms of knowledge. What it does do, however, is reveal the imperfections and ineffectuality of rationalism and empiricism, in so far as they deny levels of knowledge beyond their own, or attempt to reduce transcendental knowledge to the level of their own dialectic. As such, Revelation attempts to break asunder the bonds and shackles,

ⁱ Or knowledge by witnessing – *ma'rifat al-shubūdī*. Tr.

and extend the arbitrary boundaries that have been put on the lower sciences of humanity. The end result of this revealed knowledge is a unitive or "*tawhīdī*" ontology and anthropology. In a *tawhīdī* ontology, existents are nothing but the words or signs of God; and in a *tawhīdī* anthropology, man is nothing less—existentially and essentially—than the Word of God (*Logos*). As the Word, man is in dialogue with the signs of God and is really His interlocutor; and finally, due to his comprehension and knowledge of the reality of all things and the Divine Names, he is named the "vicegerent of God"—the *khalīfat Allāh*.

Based on the above typology of knowledge and what has been said regarding the multiple forms of awareness in understanding man and the universe, five corresponding perspectives on epistemology, ontology, and anthropology can be put forward. The following table shows these types and levels:

Type	Epistemology	Ontology	Anthropology
Contemporary Philosophical	Relativity of Perception/ Truth, Scepticism	Nihilism	Culture-making Animal, <i>homo faber (cultura)</i>
Scientific and Positivist	Empiricism and Sensationalism	Materialism	Tool-making Animal, <i>homo faber (instrumentum)</i>
Classical Philosophical	Rationalism	Idealism and Rational Order	Rational Animal, <i>homo sapiens</i>
Mythological	Imaginal and Isthmian Apparitions	Lords of Species and Pantheism	Mythical Creature, <i>homo mythicus</i>
Religious – Islamic	Revelation and Intellect	Monotheism or <i>Tawhīd</i>	Divine Vicegerent, <i>logos</i> , and Interlocutor

The interdependence of the various levels of knowledge, in the three realms mentioned above, is hardly a matter of doubt

or dispute. But beyond the mere existence of a logical coherence between epistemology, ontology and anthropology, there remains the potentially controversial matter of the existence of a hierarchy between them and the relative positions that they occupy in that hierarchy.¹

Some hold epistemology to be prior to anthropology and ontology. They believe that, with a change in man's basis of knowledge and the resulting change in his exposition of epistemological issues, his outlook on ontology and anthropology also changes.

Others are of the opinion that the awareness of existence and knowledge, or its methodology, lie in the domain of the awareness and knowledge that a person has of the human soul. That is, they put anthropology before the other two fields of knowledge.

A third group gives priority to ontology. They believe that man's awareness of being has direct bearing upon his knowledge of his soul and knowledge itself.

All three of these opinions, in spite of the arguments and proofs put forward in their favour, are united in their admission of the logical interdependence of the three fields of knowledge.

In the forthcoming discussions, the first few chapters will delineate the *tawhīdī* ontology and its corresponding anthropo-epistemology. Chapter six will investigate the mythological worldview, both in its historical and social aspects, and will then turn to its corresponding anthropology and epistemology. Chapter seven will outline the appearance and formation of three other perspectives that have taken shape in the modern world.

II. Religious and Worldly Perspectives

Islam's perspective on man and the world is not mundane or materialistic. In the mundane outlook, physical nature and the life of this world hereunder constitute all of reality. Is-

¹ Jean Wahl, *Traite de Metaphysique* (Paris: Payot, 1953), ch. 8.

lam's outlook on the world is religious, and in a religious outlook the physical world is but a part of reality—the other part being beyond the physical realm or precisely, metaphysical. The physical and metaphysical domains are variously referred to in religious terminology as “earth” (the world hereunder) and “heaven” (the hereafter); “visible” (*shahādah*) and “unseen” (*ghayb*); *mulk* (the corporeal world or “kingdom”) and *malakūt* (the spiritual world or “dominion”). In the ontology of religion, the physical is not disconnected and divorced from the metaphysical; nor are the two situated on one level—in a “horizontal” relation, so to speak. They are rather, part of a single hierarchy, which integrally connects them in a “vertical” manner; such that the physical world falls under the dominion of the metaphysical, and the spiritual (*malakūt*) dominates the corporeal (*mulk*). Hence, the relationship between the physical and the metaphysical is essentially of a different order than the relationship between physical objects themselves.

The metaphysical comprehends¹⁴ the physical in such a way that the latter comes to be known as lower and outward, or manifest, while the former is higher and inward, or immanifest. The relation between the manifest and the immanifest is not of the order of two things on the horizontal plane. It is, rather, a transcendental relation, which when compared to normal worldly relationships, appears mysterious and quite incredible.

The metaphysical realm is the inward, unseen and higher level of the physical realm itself, and due to the type of relationship that it has with physical objects, it “colours” them, giving them the appropriate quality. It is for this very same reason that the religious perspective does not see the natural physical world as a homogenous and uniform multiplicity. Rather, each and every part of the physical world—in line with the type of relation it has with the metaphysical and unseen realm—assumes a metaphysical aspect. The relation between the physical and metaphysical is similar to the one between the words of a script and their meanings. From the physical point of view, words are nothing but sounds and things that are interrelated only horizontally. But every word that is uttered or

written conveys a particular message due to the relation and connection that it has with its meaning. In this way, every word—with a view to its meaning—acquires particularities that it would not otherwise have had without its semantic (*ma'nawī*) relation. Needless to say, the relation between words and meanings is an arbitrary one, in that it is established by cultural context and the exercise of human freewill. The connection between the physical and metaphysical worlds on the other hand, is real, pertaining to the order of existence.

Words and expressions, set in various cultures, are accompanied by differing meanings and messages. These meanings, in those very same settings, have real and tangible effects—both individual and social. Some words cause pleasure and elation, while others, result in anger and distemper.

From the religious perspective, every part of the natural world, depending on the type of relation and connection it has with the metaphysical—and hence its own inner or unseen aspect—is subject to particularities and categorizations of its own and peculiar to itself.

The metaphysical realm, being the unseen world, is the source of holiness and the different values or qualities. Parts of the physical world in accordance with the relation they have with the unseen world are infused with certain values and qualities. This is why some things are “naturally” considered holy and pure, while others are seen to be base and profane.

In the secular and mundane appraisal of things, transcendental qualities (or values) and the qualifications that physical things acquire in respect to them are all imaginary—existing only in the thought and fantasy of men. From this outlook, the real source of transcendental matters are nothing but the physical dimensions of human existence along with certain tendencies that can be traced to matter. From the religious perspective, however, the above qualifications have roots in a supra-natural transcendental reality. This transcendental reality is not a concoction of the mind. On the contrary, the very mind and cognition of man, in its self-conscious journey towards this reality, apprehends and discovers it.

Belief in the existence of metaphysical dimensions of reality is a common feature of all non-materialist ontologies. Some anthropologists though, have claimed this to be particular to the religious worldview.¹

III. Tawḥidī Exposition

If religion is taken to be a set of beliefs and rituals, apart from those that a purely materialistic and worldly outlook offers, then the belief in spiritual and metaphysical dimensions of being can very well serve as the boundary between the religious and secular spheres. If this scheme is adopted, then Islam falls simply and clearly into the religious category. This, however, belies the very special type of belief in the unseen that Islam holds. From the Islamic perspective, the unseen world is in a hypostatic unity with the seen and has a "unitive form" than can only be described as *tawḥidī*. What this means is that, in the final analysis, the world is one single unseen realm that transcends all the other states of being, and is more hidden than all the planes of creation. Everything that exists in the various levels of the world—the natural world in particular—derives and descends from the unseen and will once again return to it.

Islam holds that *tawḥid* is the true religion, and sees both materialistic and polytheistic outlooks to be in error and void of truth. It calls God's prophets the messengers of the true religion. The Qur'ān says,

هُوَ الَّذِي أَرْسَلَ رَسُولَهُ بِالْهُدَىٰ وَدِينِ الْحَقِّ
لِيُظْهِرَهُ عَلَى الدِّينِ كُلِّهِ وَلَوْ كَرِهَ
الْمُشْرِكُونَ

¹ Malcolm Hamilton, *The Sociology of Religion: Theology & Comparative Perspectives* (Routledge, 2001), 21. Edward, B. Tylor, *Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Language, Art, and Custom* (4th edition, John Murray, 1903), 424.

It is He who has sent His Apostle with the guidance and the religion of truth, that He may make it prevail over all religions, though the polytheists should be averse.^{i 15}

In the Islamic outlook, all of the prophets—from Adam to the last of them, including Abraham, Moses and Jesus (may Peace be upon them all)—were called to *tawhīd*. All believed in the One God and were subservient to Him only. The differences between them lie in the divine laws that they brought—laws that God revealed for the guidance of men in different times and ages. Every prophet verified the prophet that came before him and foretold the coming of the messenger after him. The Qur'ān affirms this in the following verse:

وَإِذْ قَالَ عِيسَى ابْنُ مَرْيَمَ يَبْنِي إِسْرَءِيلَ إِنِّي
رَسُولُ اللَّهِ إِلَيْكُمْ مُصَدِّقًا لِمَا بَيْنَ يَدَيَّ مِنَ
التَّوْرَةِ وَمُبَشِّرًا بِرَسُولٍ يَأْتِي مِنْ بَعْدِي اسْمُهُ
أَحْمَدُ

And when Jesus son of Mary said, 'O Children of Israel! Indeed I am the apostle of God to you, to confirm what is before me of the Torah, and to give the good news of an apostle who will come after me, whose name is Ahmad...ⁱⁱ

The Qur'ān, while emphasizing *tawhīd*, refers to those who believe in multiple gods to be in dire error, and sees those who speak only of the material world to have gone astray. Likewise, the Qur'ān calls the worship of God and subjugation to His commands the *dīn* or "path" of all existents (from the ontological perspective) and the message or "calling" of all the prophets (from the theological and religious point of view). In this respect, God has neither differentiated amongst any of

ⁱ Qur'ān, 9:33

ⁱⁱ Qur'ān, 61:6

His prophets, nor has He condoned the following of anything other than the prophetic religions. He has said:

أَفَعَيَّرَ دِينَ اللَّهِ يَبْعُوثَ وَلَهُ أَسْلَمَ مَنْ فِي
السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ طَوْعًا وَكَرْهًا وَإِلَيْهِ
يُرْجَعُونَ

Do they, then, seek a religion other than God's, while to Him submits whoever there is in the heavens and the earth, willingly or unwillingly, and to Him they will be brought back?

قُلْ ءَامَنَّا بِاللَّهِ وَمَا أُنْزِلَ عَلَيْنَا وَمَا أُنْزِلَ عَلَى
إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَإِسْمَاعِيلَ وَإِسْحَاقَ وَيَعْقُوبَ وَالْأَسْبَاطِ
وَمَا أُوتِيَ مُوسَى وَعِيسَى وَالنَّبِيِّينَ مِنْ رَبِّهِمْ لَا
نُفَرِّقُ بَيْنَ أَحَدٍ مِنْهُمْ وَنَحْنُ لَهُ مُسْلِمُونَ

Say, 'We have faith in God, and in what has been sent down to us, and what was sent down to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob and the Tribes, and that which Moses and Jesus were given, and the prophets, from their Lord. We make no distinction between any of them, and to Him do we submit.'

وَمَنْ يَبْتَغِ غَيْرَ الْإِسْلَامِ دِينًا فَلَنْ يُقْبَلَ مِنْهُ وَهُوَ
فِي الْآخِرَةِ مِنَ الْخَاسِرِينَ

Should anyone follow a religion other than Islam, it shall never be accepted from him, and he will be among the losers in the Hereafter.ⁱ

IV. The Stages of Descent

In the Qur'ānic view, all existents have descended from God, and all of them return to Him. In some verses there is talk of the manifestation, emanation and descent of the world from the divine realm. In others, the return of things to Him is spoken of. A third group of verses mention both these movements, in both a general and specific way. The verse,

إِنَّا لِلّٰهِ وَإِنَّا إِلَيْهِ رَاجِعُونَ

Indeed we belong to God, and to Him do we indeed return,ⁱⁱ

mentions in general the origin and destination of the movement of human beings. The following verse, on the other hand, outlines the descent of all things, including man:

وَإِنْ مِنْ شَيْءٍ إِلَّا عِنْدَنَا خَزَائِنُهُ وَمَا نُنَزِّلُهُ إِلَّا بِقَدَرٍ مَّعْلُومٍ

There is not a thing but that its treasures are with Us, and We do not send it down except in a known measure.ⁱⁱⁱ

The use of the word "thing" in the above verse is such that it includes all the objects of the natural world and everything that can be conceived.

The verse quoted above begins with the negation of an indefinite clause. The exception that follows amounts to the inclusion of all things except those mentioned in the remain-

ⁱ Qur'ān, 3:83-85

ⁱⁱ Qur'ān, 2:156

ⁱⁱⁱ Qur'ān, 15:21

der of the verse—namely, God Himself and the “treasures” that are with Him. Hence, it can be concluded that everything that is in this natural and physical world has descended from the said stores or treasures.¹

This verse not only expounds the idea of derivation or descent itself, but also goes on to point out some of its stages. In other words, the concept that everything has treasure houses points to the fact that there is not only one store or treasure for a given thing, but rather, that there are a number of them, and that their descent is not from just one place. At every stage of descent, a treasure house or repository is envisioned, from which a thing—in given and specified measures—emanates and is brought forth. Further deliberation upon this verse reveals other particularities of the stages of descent: Firstly, the natural world is the last and bottom stage of descent and everything that exists on this level must have descended from prior and preceding stages. Secondly, the particularities of the existents in the natural world, for the human being who happens to be in it, are apparent and known—categories such as time, space, motion, dimensionality, etc. Thirdly, the descent of things starts from the Divinity and its first actual stage is from the treasure house that is closest to Him. It can be added that the particularity of this first stage or level, from which the descent takes place, is that it is unlimited and undetermined. This is because the verse states that the Divine descension and sending down is by certain measures and determinations. So, the predetermined existents, at their outset, are not only free of all of the faults and imperfections of the natural order, but are also beyond all types of measures and delimitations. The latter occur only after the process of descent towards the natural world begins.

The above quoted verse accords with the explanation that “determining” (*taqdīr*) is a stage that lies between the level of the treasure houses (*khazā'in*) and the natural world. In line with such an interpretation of this verse, three overall stages of

¹ Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *al-Mīzān*, vol 12, p. 143.

descent can be spoken of when discussing the descent of existents into nature.

First, is the stage of the treasures (*khazā'in*). The definitive feature of this level is that the things in it lack a particular measure or limit and exist in a non-delimited fashion. Second, is the stage of the determining (*taqdīr*). This level, though free of temporal and spatial limits and their corollaries, such as gradual change and movement, is nonetheless given to certain measures and amounts. The realistic phenomena of the dream-state correspond to this level of being. This is so because, though they have specific measures and a degree of dimensionality, they are neither limited by time nor by the other limitations of the natural realm—being free from the vicissitudes of the latter. Third, is the stage of the natural and physical world. In addition to dimension and quantity, the things in the natural world are subject to other limitations specific to this realm.

V. The Stages of Ascent

Just as the verse quoted above alludes to the stages of descent, there are other verses that mention the stages of ascent of things in general, and the ascent of man—from nature to God—in particular. Verses such as,

وَمِنْ وَرَائِهِمْ بَرْزَخٌ إِلَى يَوْمِ يُبْعَثُونَ

and beyond them is an isthmus, to the day they are raised.¹

The verse specifies three general levels in the stages of ascent from the level of man to the Divine: First, there is the stage of the natural world (*tabī'at*), in which the addressees of the verse are situated. Second exists the stage of the intermediary world or isthmus (*barzakh*), which is the stage that (temporarily) supersedes man and continues until the next, third stage. Third is the stage of the day of Resurrection (*yawm al-ba'ṭh*), which is the final stage and the one in which men are summoned into God's presence.

¹ Qur'ān, 23:100

In the mentioned verse, the second stage forms the middle-ground between this world and the Resurrection and is called the intermediary world or isthmus precisely because of its mediating function.

Muslim thinkers, in deliberating upon the above-mentioned verses of the Qur'ān as well as on certain related traditions, and by availing themselves of both the methods of mysticism and discursive philosophy, have put forward arguments and proofs for the stages of descent and ascent of the world and man. The Peripatetic philosophers have, in their turn, set up proofs for the two stages of ascent and descent. They call the world that is free of measures and amounts the "world of intellects", and the one that is dependent on it the "world of nature". They have, however, been unable to prove the existence of the middle ground between the natural and intellectual orders. The mystics or *'urafā*, on the other hand, have reported in their visions a world similar to that found in traditions; a world where things have measures and quantities but are not material.ⁱ In both Transcendental Philosophyⁱⁱ (*Hikmat al-muta'āliyah*) and the Illuminationist schoolⁱⁱⁱ (*maktab al-ishrāqī*), the existence of this middle world has been proven.^{iv}

VI. The Stages of the World

The discussions above point to the existence of three general stages in the world. Man and the world pass through these three stages in their arc of descent from the highest level—from which the arc of ascent begins—to the lowest, and they continue to traverse the three stages of the arc of ascent, back to their origin.

The three stages in these two arcs of ascent and descent—depending upon the perspective in question—are known by various names. The first stage, in its being the source and store

ⁱ Qaysari, *Sharḥ Fuṣūṣ al-Hikam*, p. 30.

ⁱⁱ Mullā Ṣadrā, *al-Hikmat al-Muta'āliyah*, vol. 7, p. 257.

ⁱⁱⁱ Quṭb al-Dīn Shīrāzī, *Sharḥ Hikmat al-Ishrāq*, p. 352.

^{iv} Aṣṭiyānī, *Sharḥ Muqadameh Qaysari*, p. 483.

of all things descended from it, is known as the treasure house (*khazā'in*); in its role as the corrector of the faults and imperfections of the lower levels, is known as the *jabarūt*. *Jabarūt* literally means omnipotence and power. This first level is also known as the Guarded Tablet (*lawḥ mahfūz*) because of both its constant and unchanging nature and the fact that the reality of all things is kept safe and guarded in it. This stage or world is known by other names also, such as the world of decree (*qaḍā*), the world of intellects (*'uqūl*), the world of ideas (*muthul*), and the world of immaterial essences. Seen from the arc of ascent, it is also called the Greater Resurrection (*qiyāmat al-kubrā*).

The second stage, which mediates between the other two stages, is by the same token, called the isthmus (*barzakh*) and because it has some measures and quantities (despite its immaterial nature), it is called the world of measure or decree (*qadr*). Now, due to its sovereignty over the natural and corporeal world and kingdom, it is called dominion (*malakūt*). Other names include: the imaginal world (*mithāl*), contiguous imagination (*khiyāl al-muttaṣil*), non-contiguous imagination (*khiyāl al-munfaṣil*), the Tablet of Negation and Affirmation (*lawḥ al-maḥw wa al-ithbāt*), and finally the Lesser Resurrection (*qiyāmat al-ṣuḡhrā*). These names pertain to the whole or parts of the second stage where it is seen from different perspectives.

The third stage is the natural world (*'ālam al-ṭabī'at*), and is also known as the material (*mādī*), kingdom or corporeal (*mulk*), visible (*shahādah*) and lower (*dunyā*) world.

Now, every level or stage is termed "visible" relative to the levels above it and "unseen" in reference to the ones below. In this way, the natural world is absolutely visible and the Divine Essence, which transcends all levels and comprehends them, is the absolute and utterly unseen or inner. The worlds situated anywhere between these two extremes—even the first stage or world of the treasures—are according to their various aspects known as either visible or unseen.

The coming and going of things to and from this world in two arcs of descent and ascent—along with the names that are given to the stages of this movement—can be seen to be a cyclic movement. If these multiple states and levels of being

were to be represented in a diagram of a pyramid, then the apex would be the Absolute Being; the first stage down would be the treasure house (also called *jabarūt*, divine decree, guarded tablet, the world of intellects, the world of ideas). The next stage would be the isthmus (also called dominion, measure, imaginal world). The last and bottom stage would be the natural world. In this hierarchal representation of being, all thing and realities—both simple and composite—are seen to descend from God. Things such as iron are said in the Qur'ān to be "sent down",

وَأَنْزَلْنَا الْحَدِيدَ

...and We sent down ironⁱ

as well as the Qur'ān itself,

إِنَّا أَنْزَلْنَاهُ فِي لَيْلَةِ الْقَدْرِ

Indeed We sent it down on the Night of Ordainment.ⁱⁱ

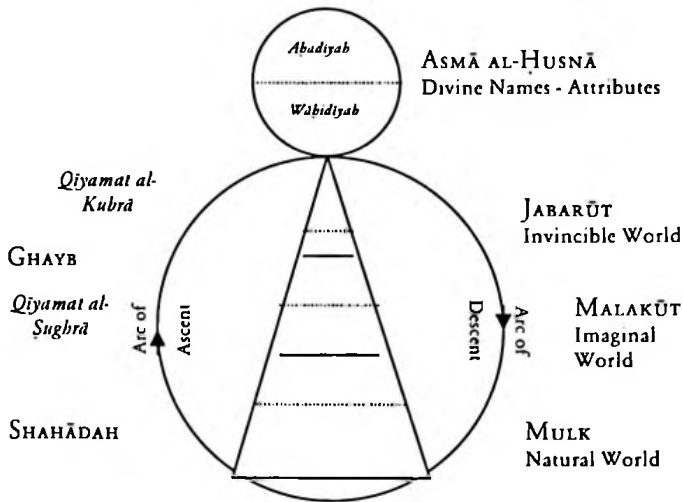


Diagram 1 – The Multiple States of Being in their Arcs of Ascent and Descent

ⁱ Qur'ān, 57:25

ⁱⁱ Qur'ān, 97:1

VII. Seven Heavens

Every higher level surrounds, envelops and comprehends the levels lower than it. Subsequently, every lower level falls under the dominion of the level above it. Every dominion—with respect to that which it encompasses and dominates—can be referred to as a “heaven” or “sky”. Correspondingly, every dominated realm—in comparison to its dominion—can be called an “earth”. In the same way that light and water descend from the sky to the earth of this lower and natural world, Divine Grace and Mercy is showered down from the spiritual skies and heavens to the realms below and the kingdom hereunder. Hence, the affairs of the earth are made and managed in heaven.

يُدَبِّرُ الْأُمْرَ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ إِلَى الْأَرْضِ

He regulates the affair from the heaven to the earth...ⁱ

More precisely, it is possible to divide the tri-level stages above into further sub-stages, and in so doing, arrive at a number of heavens and earths that fall into a precise vertical hierarchy. In this hierarchy, every heaven surrounds and comprehends the earth below it, while the divine heaven transcends them all. The Qur’ān says,

وَاللَّهُ مِنْ وَرَائِهِمْ مُحِيطٌ

and from beyond them, God is encompassing.ⁱⁱ

The existence of levels as well as their division into three general stages, can be discursively proven. The sub-levels and the conditions that apply in them, on the other hand, are only made apparent to those on the mystical path by way of direct witnessing. The Prophet, God’s blessing be upon him and his progeny, in his Nocturnal Ascension (*mi’rāj*), passed through the seven heavens and the Qur’ān also speaks of seven heavens and seven earths:

ⁱ Qur’ān, 32:5

ⁱⁱ Qur’ān, 85:20

اللَّهُ الَّذِي خَلَقَ سَبْعَ سَمَوَاتٍ وَمِنَ الْأَرْضِ مِثْلَهُنَّ
 يَتَنَزَّلُ الْأَمْرُ بَيْنَهُنَّ لِتَعْلَمُوا أَنَّ اللَّهَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ
 قَدِيرٌ وَأَنَّ اللَّهَ قَدْ أَحَاطَ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عِلْمًا

It is God who has created seven heavens, and of the earth [a number] similar to them. The command gradually descends through them, that you may know that God has power over all things, and that God comprehends all things in knowledge.ⁱ

In a tradition from Imām Riḍā,ⁱⁱ upon him be Peace, he described sevenfold heavens and earths—one above the other.ⁱⁱⁱ Now, even if the number seven here is not a hyperbole signifying “multipleness”, it is certainly not taken from Ptolemaic astronomy, since in the latter, the heavens were seen to be crystalline spheres whose number was nine, and not seven. Moreover, Ptolemaic astronomy—regardless of its factuality or error—always concerns itself with the material world of bodies, while the heavens spoken of in the Qur’ān, pertain to all the levels and states of being, physical as well as metaphysical.

Muslim philosophers have conclusively proven the three general stages of the worldⁱⁱⁱⁱ and have held that further specification is only possible by referring to the opinions of the mystics and visionaries, or alternatively, by way of conjecture and guessing.

Now, if each of the above mentioned three-fold stages were to be divided into two levels and their origin—the Divine Names and Attributes, which form the Divine Heaven—is also divided into the two states of *Aḥadiyyah* and *Wāḥidiyyah* (as the mystics have reported), then we find that there are in total eight levels or states. The highest of these levels—the Unitive

ⁱ Qur’ān, 65:12

ⁱⁱ Muḥammad Husayn Ṭabāṭabā’i, *al-Mizān*, vol 19, p. 337.

ⁱⁱⁱ Muḥammad Husayn Ṭabāṭabā’i, *Nihāyat al-Hikmah*, p. 275.

Essence—transcends all things, and the lowest is the (bottom part) of the natural order.

Hence, the highest level is exclusively heaven, and is not an earth of any level whatsoever. Likewise, the lowest level is exclusively earth, and is not a heaven relative to any other level. Now, of the remaining six levels, each is a “heaven” with respect to the levels below it and is an “earth” in respect of those above it. In this way, seven heavens and seven earths can distinctly be spoken of. These seven heavens are spiritual heavens, not material or worldly skies. It can be said that they are the heavens of the world here-under—that is to say the natural world and all that it contains is “under” and encompassed by them. Now of course in this natural world itself, there exists a heaven (or sky) and an earth pertaining to it. The heaven that pertains to this world, and is contained in it, is the very same sky that is seen by the naked eye, and the same one that is decorated by the stars. The Qur’ān says of this sky,

إِنَّا زَيْنَّا السَّمَاءَ الدُّنْيَا بِزِينَةِ الْكَوَكِبِ

Indeed We have adorned the lowest heaven with the finery
of the stars.ⁱ

The spiritual heavens that are, on the other hand, other-worldly, comprehend and encompass this material world, while not being characterized by the natural and corporeal order. It is for this reason that the means of arriving at these heavens and returning from them is not a worldly or materialistic means or method.

The spiritual heavens are such that the disbelievers and the arrogant cannot approach them. The Qur’ān speaks of those for whom the gates of heaven are shut and never opened:

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ كَذَبُوا بِآيَاتِنَا وَاسْتَكْبَرُوا عَنْهَا لَا
تُفْتَحُ لَهُمْ أَبْوَابُ السَّمَاءِ

ⁱ Qur’ān, 37:6

Indeed, those who deny Our signs and are disdainful of them -the gates of the heaven will not be opened for them...ⁱ

Now, because the management of the earth is by way of the heavens, and the earthly bounties are sent from above, the opening of the gates of heaven and the descent of heavenly grace is tantamount to the opening up and multiplication of these earthly bounties. Hence, God gives the glad tidings to the believers in this way:

وَلَوْ أَنَّ أَهْلَ الْقُرَىٰ ءَامَنُوا وَاتَّقَوْا لَفَتَحْنَا

عَلَيْهِمْ بَرَكَاتٍ مِّنَ السَّمَاءِ وَالْأَرْضِ

If the people of the towns had been faithful and Godwary,
We would have opened to them blessings from the heaven
and the earth..."

VIII. Two Motions

Man and the other existents of the natural world undergo an additional type of displacement and change, that is, other than their mere physical movements. This type of change does not take place in the natural and physical world, but rather, is the very result of entry into, and departure from, this world.

The descent of all things from the divine stores and treasures, above, to the natural world, here below—and likewise, the fall of man from paradise to this earth—is not a downward movement that has as its origin a physical place and that passes through physical space to terminate at just another point in this very same physical and natural order. This is because the origin of this descent is metaphysical and its destination is physical. The intervening distance is such that it is bordered by the spiritual heavens on one end, and by the natural world on the other. For this reason, in measuring this mo-

ⁱ Qur'ān, 7:40

ⁱⁱ Qur'ān, 7:96

tion, space and time—which compose the necessary conditions of all motion and phenomena in the natural physical order—are of no consequence. The space and time of this world are themselves phenomena that appear only after the descent and at the end of the line, so to speak. By the same token, the ascent towards the Divine is neither physical in character, nor can it be compared to any upward motions in the natural world.

The difference between ascent and descent in the physical world is arbitrary and depends on the point of reference used. For instance, if a moving object has the centre of the earth as its point of reference, any motion towards this point is called “descent” and away from it “ascent”. As an example, someone who has made the earth his point of reference will label any motion towards the moon as an “ascent”. But if the point of reference is changed, and say the moon is now chosen to be the point, then any motion towards the moon becomes a “descent” and away from it an “ascent”. It is precisely because all corporeal entities in the physical world are “horizontally” co-existent and collateral that there is not a real and absolute measure to discern ascent and descent. Ascending and descending motions relative to the natural world itself, though, do have a real difference and point of reference; the latter being independent of any particular case. Hence a thing that is in descent is all the while losing and giving up its transcendent and spiritual dimensions, and one in ascent, is entering higher worlds of meaning.

In a descent into the natural world, the distance covered is neither natural nor worldly. An ascent from the natural world also does not involve a physical or worldly type of distance. In other words, the journey that man makes in the arcs of ascent and descent is not in space-time. It is rather, a journey *into* space and time, and an escape *from* them. In short, a journey from and to space and time is quite different from a journey within space and time.

The way, path and means of a journey of ascent in the physical world is different from the way, path, and means of a journey from the confines of the physical world. God’s throne

is beyond the heavens and, hence, when Imām 'Alī,¹⁷ upon him be Peace, was asked about its distance from the place where he stood, he said, "From the place of my feet to my Lord's throne, is that a person sincerely says 'There is no god but God'"ⁱ

So, if ascent into the physical sky is by material and natural means, an ascent into the spiritual heavens takes place by virtue of faith, knowledge and sincerity.

The next two chapters will apply themselves to some of the special characteristics and conditions of the movement and journey of man and the world, from the Divine Treasures to the natural order, and then from this world back to the original abode.

ⁱ Majlisī, *Bihār al-Anwār*, vol. 10, p. 122

Chapter 3 – Descent and Manifestation

I. Manifestation (*tajallī*) versus Displacement (*tajāfī*)

Both man's journey to the natural world, and his consequent migration from it, are very different from his worldly travels in the corporeal world. Because our minds are accustomed to the journeys, ascents and descents that take place in the natural world, they tend to consider the descent into and ascent from this natural world in similar terms. Hence, it is prudent to pay special attention to the characteristics of physical ascents and descents prior to explaining their spiritual counterparts so as to be exactly aware of the differences between the two types. A comparison between physical and spiritual ascent and descent can help in preventing the many errors that the human mind and imagination are prone to in this regard. Because of the affinity of the human mind to the natural world it constantly attempts to impose the conditions of this world upon the other aspects and dimensions of being. It is the intellect that, upon consideration of the particularities of the different cases at hand, keeps the imagination under control.

The first characteristic that becomes apparent concerning the descent of things into nature is that it is by way of "manifestation" (*tajallī*). Conversely, descents in the physical world are characterised by "displacement" (*tajāfī*). For a better understanding of the principle of manifestation, it is important that the concept and conditions surrounding displacement become well known. These pertain to the natural order and therefore are familiar. Only then can the points of divergence between manifestation and displacement be properly studied.

Whenever a body in the physical world descends from one place to another, the first place becomes empty of it. For example when a raindrop descends from a cloud or when a jewel is taken from a treasure vault, the cloud or vault becomes less to exactly the extent of one drop or jewel respectively. It matters not how large and great the cloud or treasure is, though it may be very large it becomes less by just that one-drop or jewel.

This emptying of the cloud and vault is the defining characteristic of displacement (*tajāfi*).

In the descent by manifestation (*tajallī*), on the other hand, the descent of a thing does not cause any diminution or deficiency in the origin of descent. For example, in the reflection of a person in a mirror, and despite the real existence of the image of the person in the mirror, nothing is taken from the person himself and he is not any less than he was to begin with. Now, of course this is just an example and it could easily be said that in the forming of the image of the person rays of light or the like are taken from him and he is to this extent reduced. Despite such a remark, the example and the principle that it represents stand true, as it is clear that the example is not to be taken to its final limits. Now to be exact, in the final analysis there is actually no difference between the example and what it represents. This is because what are perceived to be the causes for the formation of the reflected image—things such as light, reflective surface, glass, mercury, angle of reflection, etc—are nothing but supplementary causes and agents that facilitate the appearance and manifestation of the image of the person. The person (i.e. the object being reflected) maintains its integrity irrespective of any such considerations and is not composed of these things which are supposed to form it.

Another and perhaps more graphic example that can be given for descent by *tajallī* consists of the mental forms or concepts that man forms in his imagination. For instance, prior to bringing a picture of, say, a lemon to mind, the person in question must have had knowledge of lemons. If he did not have this knowledge, then he could never picture a lemon simply by hearing its name.

This implies that, prior to mentally picturing the lemon, he did not have a distinct knowledge of it and the knowledge of the lemon resided with the knowledge of all the other things that he knows in a non-distinct form in his repository of knowledge.

This repository, which contains knowledge in a united and non-distinct fashion, is known as cognition (*malakat al-'ilmī*).

The existence of this repository-cum-faculty makes a person who possesses it in a given field, a master of that field—capable of expert opinion and a specialist in his own right. A medical doctor who has a particular speciality, for instance knows his speciality in all states, even when he is asleep or not thinking about anything in particular. It is the “active” nature of his knowledge base that makes it possible for him to immediately bring to mind the particular cure for any ill person that he observes and then to transfer this to others by way of speech or by written text. This imagining and picturing in the mind of a cure is another example of descent by *tajallī* precisely because he forms the idea or picture of the cure by using that which exists in his knowledge base, without thereby reducing anything in that base. Any given fruit or the appropriate cure and medicine for a disease that come to the mind of a person, though not externally existent, partake in a type of existence that can rightly be called “imaginal” or noetic. The watering of the mouth when imagining a lemon or the writing of a prescription when thinking of a medicine are some of the real effects of imaginal or mental knowledge.

A fruit or a cure, both of which also exist mentally, actually descend from their imaginal origin—that is to say they are manifested from man’s repository of knowledge. This is because the cognition of the doctor or the knowledge base of someone who knows fruits is neither altered nor diminished in the least during and after the picturing and imagining. If this were not the case and some type of change took place in the knowledge base or cognition of the person imagining an object—implying a descent by *tajāfī* of the idea from the repository of knowledge to the mind—then the general and undifferentiated knowledge of a thing would cease to exist after its distinct and particular conception.

The above examples, when a rigorous attention to detail and exactness is not demanded, more than suffice to represent the idea of descent by *tajallī*.

Many Islamic source materials simultaneously give credence to the stability and inexhaustible nature of the Divine Treasures and deny that any emptying or displacement takes place

during a descent from them. For instance, in *Du'ā al-iftitāḥ* God is addressed in the following way: "the open-handed Granter of good Who's bounties and treasures are not diminished and Who's abundance of giving increases Him in nothing but goodness and generosity."ⁱ

In the everyday prayer of the month of Rajab that is read after the daily prayers, the following expression is to be found: "O God! Grant me all the goodness of this world and all the goodness of the next. Keep from me all the evil of this world and the evil of the next. For surely that which You give is never diminished."ⁱⁱ

Now, if Divine bestowal and munificence should cause the Divine treasures to be lessened, or in other words, if the descent of things from the treasures should be by *tajāfī*, then whenever God gives all of the good of this world and of the next to a single individual, two related problems arise: The act would completely exhaust the treasuries of good, and subsequently, make it impossible to give anything else of good to others.

If, however, the said descent should be by *tajallī*, then these problems are avoided. In the first place, even after all of the good of the heavens and the earth is given to a person, the Divine Treasures are not reduced in the least. In the second place, there remains the possibility that a second person who joins in the prayer is also given all the good of the two worlds—all out of His grace and munificence.

Tajallī is a term that has been used in the Qur'ān and *Hadīth*. God has said in the Qur'ān,

فَلَمَّا تَجَلَّىٰ رَبُّهُ لِلْجَبَلِ جَعَلَهُ دَكًّا وَخَرَّ
مُوسَىٰ صَعِقًا

...So when his Lord disclosed Himself to the mountain, He levelled it, and Moses fell down swooning....ⁱⁱⁱ

ⁱ Shaykh 'Abbās Qummī, "Du'ā al-iftitāḥ" in *Mafātīḥ al-Jinān*.

ⁱⁱ Shaykh 'Abbās Qummī, "Ad'iyat shahr al-Rajab" in *Mafātīḥ al-Jinān*.

ⁱⁱⁱ Qur'ān, 7:143

In other places in the Qur'ān, there are similar references to the crumbling and destruction of whole mountains. For instance in the chapter *Hashr* we read,

لَوْ أَنزَلْنَاهُ هَذَا الْقُرْآنَ عَلَى جَبَلٍ لَّرَأَيْتَهُ خَاشِعًا
مُتَصَدِّعًا مِّنْ خَشْيَةِ اللَّهِ

Had We sent down this Qur'ān upon a mountain, you surely would see it humbled and rent asunder, out of the fear of God.ⁱ

Both this rending asunder of the mountain and its crumbling in the account of Moses are due to a single cause. This is because the Qur'ān is a reality in which God has manifested Himself—by an effusion or self-disclosure—and hence the descent of the Qur'ān upon a mountain is tantamount to His manifestation upon it. God's manifestation—just as in the theophanic episode of Moses—makes the hardest and most durable of earthly phenomena to crumble and fall apart as if it was nothing.

Imām 'Alī (upon him be Peace), speaking about God's *tajallī* in the Qur'ān, has said: "And He manifested Himself to them in His book."ⁱⁱ In the *Nahj al-balāghah*, the Imām praises God for His manifesting Himself to His creation by saying, "All-praise be to God, the Manifested for His creation by His creation."ⁱⁱⁱ Hence, it can be concluded that it is not only the idea of *tajallī* but also the word itself, in its various derivative forms, which appears in various Islamic texts and resources to clarify the relationship that man and the other created beings have with God.

The descent of things from the Divine Presence, through the intermediary stages and levels and until their final destination here in the natural order, forms one single continuum. Moreover, just as the verse of "...and We do not send it down

ⁱ Qur'ān, 59:21

ⁱⁱ *Nahj al-balāghah*, sermon 147.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Nahj al-balāghah*, sermon 108.

but in a known measureⁱ alludes to, the integrity of these levels is maintained during the descent. That is to say, the Divine Effusion (*al-fayḍ al-ilāhī*) initiates its descent in the Divine Heaven to the treasures and the invincible world (*jabarūt*), continuing to the isthmus and the world of measures, and from there, manifesting itself finally in nature and the corporeal world. If it were otherwise, and God's majesty or the reality of the Qur'ān that is with Him were to directly manifest themselves in this lower world, then there would remain no place for the manifestation of the other existents and inhabitants of the natural and imaginal worlds. In such a case, not only the Mount of Ṭūr, but even the place of the first Qur'ānic revelation—the Mount of Nūr—would be rent asunder and all that which is to occur on the Day of Resurrection would become apparent. On this Day, all mountains are to be razed to the ground, for the Qur'ān says:

وَسُيِّرَتِ الْجِبَالُ فَكَانَتْ سَرَابًا

and the mountains will be set moving and become a mirage.ⁱⁱ

II. Continued Presence (*tadāwum al-ḥudūr*)

The second particularity of the descent of things from the invincible realm of the Divine Treasures to the spiritual domain of the isthmus, and then, to the corporeal and natural world, is that the object of descent never leaves the real presence of the origin of descent. This is contrary to physical descents, in which the object must leave the origin for the descent to take place.

A raindrop that falls from a cloud and into an eaves-trough is in a place that the cloud is not. The precious jewel that is taken from the vault and now dangles upon the person of a paramour is no longer in the vault. Similarly, the raw material

ⁱ Qur'ān, 15:21

ⁱⁱ Qur'ān, 78:20

of a production line that becomes a finished product and is put on the market is not to be found in the warehouse.

These are all examples of the second particularity. The latter differs from the first particularity in that, in the first, the emphasis was on the loss and depletion of the source of descent, and in the second, it is the limitation and absence of the origin of descent with respect to the place and destination of descent.

In the descent to the natural world as opposed to the descent in the natural world, the object of descent remains in the presence (*mahḍar*) and under the dominion of the origin of descent. A good example of this is the concept that the soul, by recourse to its repository of knowledge, creates in the mind. In this case, even after it has further conceptualised the idea in detail, the initial idea remains known in general and present to the faculty from which it got its inspiration. It is clear in this example that there is no decrease in the faculty or repository of knowledge and there is no displacement of the conceptualised idea and it remains ever-present to the faculty in question. The presence and existence of the object of cognition is intimately linked to the presence and existence of cognition itself and its agent. This is so to the extent that if the soul—the agent of cognition—is even for a moment heedless of the concept and idea present in the mind, then the idea immediately ceases to be. Now, the things that descend from the dominion (*malakūt*) to the kingdom (*mulk*) are in a similar situation. They are “dominated” by the dominion, hence the name. The kingdom and all that is in it is conversely “owned” by and in the control of the dominion and ultimately the *Dominus*.

Even though it is true that, technically, the term dominion (*malakūt*) refers to both the isthmus and the imaginal world, in some cases it is also made to refer to the invincible world of the treasures (*jabarūt*). This is so precisely because of its role of comprehension of, dominion over, and ubiquitous presence with, the natural world and all the other worlds lower than itself.

The Qur'ān holds that all things have a dominion and then goes on to assert that the dominion of all things is in the power and control of God, the *Dominus*.

فَسُبْحَانَ الَّذِي بِيَدِهِ مَلَكُوتُ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ

So immaculate is He in whose hand is the dominion of all things.¹

III. Limiting, Not Limited

The third particularity of the descent of things from the *ja-barūt* to the *malakūt*, and from the *malakūt* to the *mulk*, is that the limitations of the descended thing do not necessitate any limitation in the origin of descent. In physical descents, however, the thing that descends always calls forward limitations in its origin and gives evidence of these same limitations.

The raindrop which has fallen from a cloud, despite its minuscule nature and even assuming that the descent was not by displacement, has certain perfections and attributes that the cloud itself lacks. The mountain spring from which water has gushed out for years on end, even though the flow has not noticeably become less, is nonetheless deprived of the perfections and qualities of exactly that amount of water which has flowed out from it. The driver who yesterday filled his petrol tank can tell how much petrol he has used up by the distance that he has travelled.

In the descent by manifestation, the limitations and qualifications of the origin do not accompany the object of descent. Hence, any given mental image that a person pictures in his mind cannot be said to indicate or qualify the limits of his faculty of knowledge. The proof of this third characteristic and particularity is, in actuality, the first two particularities of the descent by manifestation mentioned above.

¹ Qur'ān, 36:83

So, the fruit that is envisaged in the mind is, firstly, not descended from the repository of knowledge by way of displacement (*tajāfi*) so as to create some deficiency in the origin or to give evidence to its imperfection. Secondly, it is not absent from the purview and presence of the origin so as to point out a place or state from which the origin of descent is missing or lacking.

The relationship of the *mulk* to the *malakūt* and the *jabarūt* is similar in the sense that phenomena of the natural and physical order do not delimit the higher metaphysical worlds in any way. This also applies to God Himself, as He is above all the worlds. It is the metaphysical realities and the Real Itself that manifests limited beings as well as their limitations through a process of self-disclosure. It is with reference to the origin of descent, then, that the perfections and qualities that the descended thing lacks come to be known.

In the prayer for the first day of *Rajab*,¹ God is described as the Limiter—the Setter of the limits of all things (*hāddu kulli maḥdūd*), meaning that it is God who reveals and causes all things to descend in particular measures and limits and the decree of all things is in His command. Hence, the measure and limits of any thing can only fully be known by a reference to the Divine Essence while nothing can delimit this Essence nor confine it to any definable realm.

IV. Manifestation of Unity

The fourth characteristic of the descent to nature is, in fact, a corollary of the previous three. To explain, the numerousness of emanations and descents by manifestation provides ample evidence for the greatness and majesty of the origin of descent. When things are sent down by way of manifestation and effusions, the manifold aspects and dimensions of the source and agent of manifestation become better known. In the descents that occur within the physical world, on the other

¹ al-Shaykh al-Tūsī, "Shahr Rajab, Awwal Yawm min Rajab" in *Miṣbāḥ al-Mutahajjid*, p. 804.

hand, the greater the number of things sent or produced from a source, the more the source is diminished.

All things in the natural order are transitory and perishable. As any thing in the corporeal realm ages, it declines and comes nearer to its non-existence. The Qur'ān says:

وَمَنْ نُّعَمِّرْهُ نُنَكِّسْهُ فِي الْخَلْقِ

And he whom We lengthen in age, We reverse him in creation...

It is for this reason that the more years that a mine has been in operation, the greater is the fear of it becoming depleted of ore. Similarly, reserves that have been drawn upon for a long time are accurately thought to be nearing their end.

Heavy usage of a physical object is generally considered to be a liability for it. On the contrary, less usage or its "newness" is considered to be an asset. However, if the descent in question is not in the physical world but from the metaphysical to the physical world—that is to say that it is by *ta-jallī* and not *tajāfī*—then the reverse holds. In this case, the more the origin of descent is "used", the more apparent becomes its grandeur and sublimity.

The person who is able to study a simple geometric shape and come up with hundreds of axioms and corollaries about it provides evidence for his powers of cognition and intellection. The more he is able to expand on in this study, the greater the depth and breadth of his knowledge. The situation of the physical and corporeal world is analogous to this. The greater the spread and scope of this world (*mulk*) and the more multiplicity it espouses, the greater appears the grandeur and depth of the spiritual world (*malakūt*), the invincible world of the Divine Treasures (*jabarūt*), and in fact, the Divinity Itself.

Now, it is for this very reason that on various occasions the Qur'ān has recounted the multiplicity and numerousness of nature, and in some other cases, has explicitly declared man's impotence in being able to count the same.

¹ Qur'ān, 36:68

وَإِنْ تَعُدُّوا نِعْمَتَ اللَّهِ لَا تَحْصُوهَا¹

If you enumerate God's blessings, you will not be able to count them.¹

Despite this statement from God about the innumerability of His bounties, He has referred to all of them as being signs, proofs, and evidences of Himself and His boundless treasures.

إِنَّ فِي خَلْقِ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَاخْتِلَافِ اللَّيْلِ وَالنَّهَارِ وَالْفُلْكِ الَّتِي تَجْرِي فِي الْبَحْرِ بِمَا يَنْفَعُ النَّاسَ وَمَا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ مِنْ مَّاءٍ فَأَحْيَا بِهِ الْأَرْضَ بَعْدَ مَوْتِهَا وَبَثَّ فِيهَا مِنْ كُلِّ دَابَّةٍ وَتَصْرِيفِ الرِّيْحِ وَالسَّحَابِ الْمُسَخَّرِ بَيْنَ السَّمَاءِ وَالْأَرْضِ لَآيَاتٍ لِقَوْمٍ يَعْقِلُونَ

Indeed in the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the alternation of night and day, and the ships that sail at sea with profit to men, and the water that God sends down from the sky —with which He revives the earth after its death, and scatters therein every kind of animal and the changing of the winds, and the clouds disposed between the sky and the earth, are surely signs for a people who intellect..."²

In his commentary on *Du'ā al-Saḥar*, Imām Khumaynī¹⁸ writes the following with regards to the phrase of prayer, *Allāhumma innī as'aluka min 'aẓamatika*...: "He is great in His essence, great in His attributes, great in His acts. And from the

¹ Qur'ān, 14:34

² Qur'ān, 2:164

greatness of His act is known the greatness of the name presiding over it, and from its (i.e. the name's) greatness is known the greatness of the Essence while it (i.e. the name) is in its own capacity (and according to its own level and limits) one of the manifestations (and effusions) of it (i.e. the Divine Essence)".ⁱ

In the above mentioned text, Imām Khumaynī holds that the grandeur of God's acts and the greatness of His Names are the signs of the greatness of His Essence, due to the fact that they have emanated and descended by *tajallī* from Him. He continues on to discuss the great nature of the acts of God.

V. Comprehensive Distinction

The fifth characteristic of the descent to the material world is that the difference and distinction between the descended thing and the origin of descent is what can be called a "comprehensive distinction" (*tamāyuz ihāṭī*) and is one-sided. In a physical descent, however, the distinction is two-sided and the otherness is by separation. Two things can be said to be "distinct" from one another when one of them has an attribute or perfection that the other lacks. If all of the attributes that apply to one of the things applied to the other, there would be no distinction between the two and in fact they would be one thing. For example if all of the particularities of a given clock existed in a second clock—viz. mass, height, width, depth, colour, form, position...—then they would be indistinguishable in all their aspects and would really be one single clock.

Differences and distinctions that exist in physical things are always two-sided and are separative (*'azlī*). That is to say, each one of two material things, despite their points of commonality, contains aspects and particularities that the other does not have. This can be likened to two brothers who share common parents but mutually differ in many personal traits and characteristics.

A comprehensive distinction differs from a separative and two-sided distinction in that, in the former, it is only one of

ⁱ Rūḥu'llah Khumaynī, *Sharḥ Du'ā al-Saḥar*, p. 33, line 9.

the two sides that contains the attributes and perfections that the second is lacking in.¹ This second side, then, does not have any characteristic that the first does not have. The set of whole numbers and levels of light are two examples of this type of distinction. In the sequence of whole numbers the numbers nine and ten, say, are distinct one from the other. The distinction lies in the quantity that exists in the number ten, but which the number nine is lacking in. This is because nine does not have anything that ten lacks or needs, whereas ten has everything that nine has plus something extra.

Bright light is different from weak or dim light. But dim light cannot be said to "have" something that accounts for this difference. Now it can be argued that both dim light and the number nine have attributes that bright light and the number ten respectively don't have. For it can be said that the number nine is "lower" or "less" and that dim light is "weaker". But it must be noted that these attributions are reflective of a lack or need in the number nine or dim light, that is they are a result of what they "don't have" and not what they "have". This lack or weakness is only perceptible when compared to its opposite attribute. So, it is only by looking at the greater number or the stronger light—that exist in the number ten and bright light respectively—that one becomes aware of the lack of these qualities in the number nine and dim light. Hence, the reference point of attributes that result from an absence and negation of existential qualities is never found in the side that lacks them, but rather in the opposing, "fuller" side.

The above are two examples for the purposes of illustration only and their divergence, upon a strict analytic comparison, from the idea that they represent does not reduce the veracity of the idea in the least.

When the things that descend from the Divine Treasures to the isthmus and imaginal world and then to the natural and physical world are compared to their ideas and realities in the higher worlds, it becomes apparent that the distinctions are not two-sided ones and the differences are not ones resulting

¹ 'Abdullah Jawādī Āmulī, *Tahrīr Tambīd al-Qawā'id*, p.122, 332.

from separation. For these things, which have descended by *tajallī*—and even after their descent remain within the scope (*iḥāṭah*) of the origin and subsist in its continuous presence—do not possess anything that the origin lacks. On the other hand, the origin of descent has perfections that they do not. Now, if certain particularities such as ignorance or temporal and spatial limitations—exclusive to the material domain—are attributed to the lower levels, it must be understood that these attributes are not based on the positive and existential aspects of the lower levels. On the contrary, they arise from the aspect of imperfection, weakness, lack and need inherent within these levels. Hence, the fact that the higher levels do not contain these “negative” attributes in no way limits them from having one-sided comprehensive distinctions with the lower ones. Comprehensive distinctions are impossible only when each side contains aspects that are not in the scope of the other side, thus, preventing one from being totally present for the other.

The spiritual realities (*ḥaqā'iq malakūtī*), from which the material things of the natural world have descended, contain all the perfections of the lower levels. Because these higher realities are not bound by the limits and imperfections of material things, they encompass and comprehend them and are always present with them. God, Who is the origin and source of all manifestations and effusions, is above all levels and states of being and hence comprehends and encompasses all things.

God's distinction from other existents is also a comprehensive distinction. This is because there is no possible existent which has a perfection that God does not, and which He does not encompass. It is due to this comprehensive distinction between God and all levels and states of being that He is not absent from any of them and is omni-present. The Qur'ān says,

وَهُوَ الَّذِي فِي السَّمَاءِ إِلَهٌُ وَفِي الْأَرْضِ إِلَهٌُ

It is He who is God in the sky, and God on the earth...ⁱ

ⁱ Qur'ān, 43:84

He is present in the heavens and the earth, without being of them or coloured by them and without being limited by any of their limitations. The heavens and the earth subsist by His being. The sky is the sky and the earth is the earth by His existence. He gives to all things their limits and definitions but is Himself free of all such things.

Mullā Hādī Sabzawārī in his *Manzūma al-hikmah* mentions separative distinction and otherness and contrasts it to what he calls "attributive distinction" (*tamāyuz wasfī*) —the latter being identical to the comprehensive distinction that was mentioned above. He takes the term "attributive distinction" to be derived from a saying of Imām 'Alī, in which the Imām differentiated God from His creation. Mullā Sabzawārī¹⁹ writes, "and one of the sayings of Amīr al-Mu'minin Sayyid al-Muwahhidīn 'Alī (upon whom be Peace) is: To unify Him is to make Him distinct from His creation, and distinction is otherness in attributes not otherness by separation".¹

VI. Absolute Unity

In the descent to nature, the origin cannot be put alongside the things that descend from it and be counted as though it were one of them. In a physical descent, on the other hand, because there is no *tajallī* at play and the descent is by *tajāfī*, the origin of descent can always be counted alongside the descended objects as making up one collection.

Every physical object in the natural world occupies a certain space and position. No two objects can ever exactly be located in the same space. Every physical object is juxtaposed by other objects and can be said to be "horizontal" to them. This rule applies to the origin of physical descents just as it does to the things that derive from it. It is for this reason that things in nature can always be counted alongside one another.

The particular number that is associated with any given item in a set of objects depends upon where the counting was initiated from and, thus, is arbitrary. As such, repeated counts

¹ Mullā Hādī Sabzawārī, *Sharḥ Manzūmah*, p. 83

may yield different numbers being associated to the objects in the collection. For example, in a set of three objects, the first one counted is the first of three, the second is the second of three and the third is of course the third of three. But if the order is changed and the second object from the first count is the starting point, all of the numbers change without any particular problem arising.

In the descent to nature, because the origin is comprehensively distinct to the things that descend from it, it encompasses them and is present with them wherever they happen to be. For example, if two things descend by way of *tajalli* from the origin, the encompassing nature of the origin means that the two things are not taken into account when the origin itself is regarded. In other words, when the perspective in question is centred upon the origin, all that has come from it remains in its perpetual presence and light and thus is virtually annihilated and reflects only the origin. But if, on the other hand, attention is paid to the two descended things, a multiplicity (or duplicity in this example) is observed. This, when further deliberated upon, results in the intellectual understanding that reality does not stop at these two things and that there is a third agent at play that could be nothing other than the origin of the two. At this point, if the third "thing" is considered, the "other" two things are no longer seen as being alongside it so as to be counted along with it.

When the perspective of multiplicity is taken into account and becomes the point of reference, descended things become distinguishable and the encompassing unity which surrounds them—not being of their level—does not add anything to the their quantity. Now, because this unity and origin have been referred to above as the "third" thing, to prevent any misunderstanding, it must be said that it is not the third of a group of three but rather it is the "third" of a set of two.

The third of (a set of) three, as has been mentioned above, is an arbitrary attribute whose referent differs when the order is changed. The third of (a set of) two on the other hand, is a real attribute and remains the same regardless of the differing perspectives applied to the set. The "third of two" is an attrib-

ute then that is only given to a thing that encompasses and comprehends other things. The latter are never characterized by such an expression.

The comprehensive distinction of every level with respect to levels lower than it was seen to establish the higher level's presence in the lower levels. This cannot be taken to mean, however, that realities of the higher level are brought down to the level of the lower so as to be counted as one of the existents of that lower level. It is for this same reason that God, Who encompasses and is infinitely near to all things, can never be said to be on a par with them, nor can He ever be enumerated along with them. The Qur'ān echoes this truth by, on the one hand, emphasizing God's omni-presence and immanence, while on the other, refuting the idea that God is rank and file with other things and that He subsists alongside the things that have effused from Himself. The Qur'ān labels such ideas as polytheistic and designates their holders as disbelievers.

With regards to God's immanent presence in all things, the Qur'ān says:

وَهُوَ مَعَكُمْ أَيْنَ مَا كُنْتُمْⁱ

He is with you wherever you may be.ⁱ

About the blasphemy of counting God to be a thing among others the Qur'ān has this to say:

لَقَدْ كَفَرَ الَّذِينَ قَالُوا إِنَّ اللَّهَ ثَالِثُ ثَلَاثَةٍ

Surely they disbelieve who say 'Surely God is the third of the three'...ⁱⁱ

In the Qur'ānic terminology God is not the third of three but rather the third of two, or the fourth of three, or the sixth of five.ⁱⁱⁱ

ⁱ Qur'ān, 57:4

ⁱⁱ Qur'ān, 5:73

ⁱⁱⁱ Mullā Ṣadrā, *al-Shawāhid al-Rabūbiyah*.

أَلَمْ تَرَ أَنَّ اللَّهَ يَعْلَمُ مَا فِي السَّمَوَاتِ وَمَا فِي الْأَرْضِ
 مَا يَكُونُ مِنْ نَجْوَى ثَلَاثَةٍ إِلَّا هُوَ رَابِعُهُمْ
 وَلَا خَمْسَةٍ إِلَّا هُوَ سَادِسُهُمْ وَلَا أَدْنَى مِنْ ذَلِكَ
 وَلَا أَكْثَرَ إِلَّا هُوَ مَعَهُمْ أَيْنَ مَا كَانُوا

Have you not regarded that God knows whatever there is in the heavens and whatever there is in the earth? There is no secret talk among three, but He is their fourth [companion], nor among five but He is their sixth, nor less than that, nor more, but He is with them wherever they may be....”ⁱ

That is to say, wherever something exists, He also is present.

If God were the third of three, the fourth of four, the fifth of five, and the like, then He would be alongside the things that have come from Him and, hence, not present where they are. Now, it is because He is the third of two and the fifth of four that the last part of the verse quoted above applies to Him, and because of this it is said “He is with them wheresoever they may be.”

From the vantage point of the Qur’ān, because the entirety of the universe has come from God by way of *tajallī*, He is the One who is with all existents in all states, yet can never be counted alongside any one of them and is Unique from them. He is a One for which a second cannot even be supposed (for multiplicity to be brought about after the supposition).

Because God is absolute, he has not bounds and delimitations. He comprehends all things and hence can never be put alongside them. His unity is not countable and numerical.

Imām ‘Alī (upon whom be Peace), said that “He is One without number.” This is because a thing that has a number to it can be more or less. Now to simply know that something

ⁱ Qur’ān, 58:7

exists says nothing about its quantity. But absolute existence is not like this. By the very nature of its absoluteness it can be said that it is one for which an "other" cannot exist.

The quality of unity cannot be separated from reality and from God's existence, just as omni-presence, comprehensive-ness, encompassment, and immanence cannot be negated from Him. With respect to Him there is no "other" so that this other should be His son or father. And again, for Him no "second" can be postulated so that it could be His like, associate or companion. These truths are only insignificant drops from the oceans of knowledge that the chapter of *al-Tawḥīd* in the Qur'ān contains. "In the name of God, the Beneficent, the Merciful. Say, He, God is One. God is Absolute (*Ṣamad*). He begets not, nor is He begotten. And there is none like unto Him".

Ṣamad is a great invincible stone that contains no fissures or cracks whatsoever and is a sanctuary whose confines are impregnable to outsiders. Absolute unity (*waḥdat al-ṣamadī*) is an all-pervading unity that leaves no room for empty spaces. The verses of the chapter of *al-Tawḥīd* and the first verses of the chapter of *al-Ḥadīd*ⁱ in the Qur'ān indicate the presence of an all-inclusive, all-pervading, comprehensive unity in immanence with all things. There is a saying narrated from Imām Sajjād²⁰ (upon him be Peace) to the effect that God knew that in the latter days there would come a people who would be given to contemplation and rigorous thought, and hence, He revealed the chapter of *al-Tawḥīd* and the first verses of the chapter of *al-Ḥadīd*.ⁱⁱ

VII. Descension and Emanation

In the descent of things from the Divine Treasures, descension always accompanies emanation (*ṣudūr*)ⁱⁱⁱ and creation. In the descents within the physical world, however, there is no

ⁱ Qur'ān, 57:1-6

ⁱⁱ Kulaynī, third ḥadīth of "kitāb al-tawḥīd, bab al-nisbah" in *al-Kaṣf*, vol. 1, p. 91.

ⁱⁱⁱ Implying origination and generation as well as emanation.

talk of creation and the formation of a new thing—there is only a change in the spatial coordinates and position of the thing undergoing descent. Due to the fact that this physical displacement takes place in a certain time, all material existents necessarily have a temporal nature. The raindrop that falls from the cloud is exactly the same drop of water that it was before it fell from the cloud—its descent only entails its movement and displacement from the sky to the ground. As such, in any physical descension, the descending thing leaves an empty space in the origin after its departure from it and hence the descent takes place by way of *tajāfī*.

The existent which emanates from the boundless Divine Treasures by *tajallī* on the other hand—measured out in certain proportions in the isthmus and appearing finally in the material realm—is fashioned anew at every stage. This means that the physical reality of corporeal objects in relation to their imaginal existence in the isthmus, as well as the imaginal and spiritual form of the same in relation to its being in the Divine Treasures and the *jabarūt*, is new.

The natural and physical form of a thing is not the same as its imaginal (*malakūtī*) or its invincible (*jabarūtī*) form. A descent through these worlds is not just a matter of a change in place and time. Rather, the *jabarūtī* and *malakūtī* realities of a thing stay constant and unchanged on their own levels, but here, the form of the thing that has descended by *tajallī*, is new and different—a novelty of creation in its own right. It is for this reason that the Qur'ān, which holds God to be the Revealer and the source of descent of all things to nature, describes God as the Creator (*al-khāliq*) and Originator (*al-fāṭir*) of the heavens and the earth.

Fāṭir is the nominative noun of the Arabic root F-Ṭ-R meaning the splitting or rending asunder of darkness by light, non-existence by existence. Hence, the *fāṭir* is the subject who first creates something. It is in this meaning that the exegesis of the Qur'ānic verse,

الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ فَاطِرِ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ

All praise be to God, the Originator of the heavens and the earth,ⁱ

is that He created the heavens and the earth when before they did not exist. That is to say, His act of creating is not like that of an artisan who takes a material object and by applying his skill, changes its form to yield "another" object. The nature of God's creation is such that, without a precedent in the *malakūt* or the *mulk*, He makes things to descend from His treasures, and with every descent into a lower level, He manifests them there for the first time.

Regarding the innovative nature of God's creative act, Imām 'Alī (upon him be Peace) says, "He did not create things from primal materials, nor from eternal archetypes, but rather He created what He created...."ⁱⁱ

VIII. Illuminationist Relations

The eighth characteristic of the descent to nature is that the object of descent does not have an independent existence of its own. To explain, the thing that has descended is really nothing but a relation and nexus (*rabṭ*) with the origin of descent. Furthermore, any actuality and concrete existence that the thing in question can be said to have is accounted for solely by this relation and its nature. In a physical descent, on the other hand, the thing that undergoes descent by *tajāfī* continues to exist in its own right after the descent—in such a way that at this point the existence or non-existence of the origin of descent is of no consequence whatsoever.

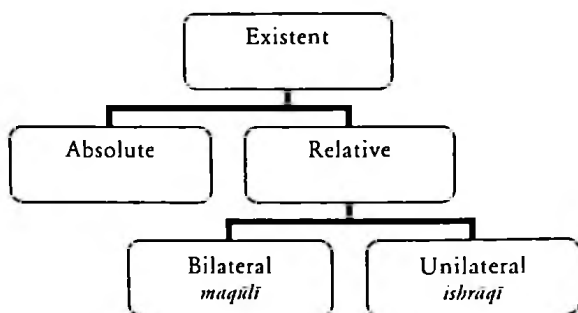
The dependent nature of things that descend by way of *ta-jallī* can be deduced from the previously mentioned characteristics of this type of descent. This is because this type of descent was seen to be by way of emanation, innovation and originationⁱⁱⁱ. All of these meanings involve relations.

ⁱ Qur'ān, 35:1

ⁱⁱ *Nahj al-balāghah*, sermon 163.

ⁱⁱⁱ The word "origination" in this chapter refers to the "originative act" and "originating", and it is not to be taken in its meaning of "origin". Tr.

In an initial categorization, all existents can be divided into two groups, absolute (*nafsī*) and relative (*nisbī*). The latter can be further divided into two types, those whose relation is one-way and unilateral (or unipolar or uniaxial to be precise) and those whose relation is a two-way or bilateral. The bilateral relationship is termed, *idāfah maqūlī*, and the uniaxial one is called, *idāfah ishrāqī* (illuminative relation).



A non-relative or absolute existent is one whose reality and meaning is for itself and not dependent upon another reality or meaning—as in the case of “man”. A relative existent, on the other hand, is one in whose meaning and conception there is implicit the idea of another reality. The actualisation of this relative existent then, depends upon the actualisation of the other.

The bilateral relation (*idāfah maqūlī*)—such as fatherhood, tallness, childhood, loving, etc —is not an absolute attribute or quality, but is, rather, a relative one. The meaning of “tallness” is dependent upon two sides that are called the two terms of the relation. These terms are realities which, when measured and compared against each other, give birth to the idea of “tallness”. For instance, when two men, two trees or two walls, are measured in height and the quantities duly compared, one of the two is given the relative attribute “tall” and the other “short”. Loving also needs two sides. In this relationship, both lover and beloved are required. The lover can be a man

or any other sentient being, while the beloved could be God or any of His creatures.

In a bilateral relation, the existence of the relation is dependent upon the pre-existence of its two terms. Hence, it is impossible to postulate the existence of the former if one or both of the terms are absent. For example, it is possible for a man and the thing that he could love to exist without there being a relation of love existing between the two. However, it is not possible for the man to become a lover without there first being in place both himself—the man—and the object of his love.

The uniaxial relation (*iḍāfah ishrāqī*)—such as creation, origination, or emanation—is like the bilateral relation in that two distinct sides can be posited for it. The difference between the two is that the uniaxial relation, for its actualisation, depends on only one of the two sides or terms—the other term not really having an existence or actuality apart and separate from the reality of the relation itself. Hence, the external and concretely existing referent of this second term of the relation is none other than the relation itself.

The descent by *tajallī*, which was seen to be the emanation and origination of existents, is a uniaxial relation (*iḍāfah ishrāqī*). This is because conceptually it has the two sides—the originator and the thing originated or created—to make it a relation in the first place. Now, origination and creation do not occur without the existence of an originator and creator. Moreover, the creator can exist prior to the existence of the created being but the converse does not hold. The created being—emanated by *tajallī*—is actualised in the very process of creation and emanation. Hence, the second term of this relation cannot be prior to the first, or to the relation, and in fact is a part and parcel of the relation itself. This fulfils the conditions of a uniaxial relation.

In descents by *tajāfī*, the thing that descends exists prior to the actual descent. The descent only causes its position to change. Hence, in this case, both the object of descent and the origin of descent have concrete existences independent of the actual act of descent.

The descent of the corporeal world (*mulk*) from the dominion and spiritual world (*malakūt*), and the latter from the Divine Treasures, is also by *tajallī*. By means of this descent, the object of descent acquires its existence, essence and actuality, while God, by His bestowal of being, plays His part as its Originator and Creator. Hence, the *mulk*, not having actualisation of its own *a priori*—as does the Creator—has no concrete reality whatsoever prior to the act of emanation, descent and creation.

The reality of the natural world and the *mulk* is identical to divine emanation and creation, and it is by means of the latter that God manifests Himself in the created order. While a distinction can be made between the Creator and the act of creation—the former being in all respects prior to the latter—the same cannot be said of the created and the act of creation. The created and creation are really one single reality and any distinctions made between the two are merely mental concepts. In this type of relation, it is only the first term—the Creator or Originator in this case—which has priority over the relation itself; the second term—the created being—is identical to the relation (the relation of creation and origination in the example at hand). To repeat, the second term of the relation is the same as the relation to which it seems an adjunct. The first term of the relation is prior to the relation. Hence, the second term is posterior to the first.

The unity and identity that the uniaxial relation has with the second term of the relation means that, like the relation itself, the second term also lacks an independent existence and is an adjunct of and dependent upon the first term for its reality. Again, the originated and created is not a “thing” from beforehand for the act of origination or creation to be attributed to it—in hindsight as it were. It is the very act itself.

It is due to the identity presiding between the created or originated on one hand, and the act of creation or origination on the other, that the Qur’ān has referred to the reality of man by the terms “origination of God” (*ṣiḥrat Allah*) or the “creation of God”.²¹ The Qur’ān says,

فَطَرَتَ اللَّهُ الَّتِي فَطَرَ النَّاسَ عَلَيْهَا

the origination of God upon which man has been originated;ⁱ

directly implying that the reality of the originated is not different from origination itself. Now, origination was seen to have a relative and not an absolute meaning in which the idea of bond and nexus with the source and the first term was the defining theme. Thus, it can be concluded that man has a relative reality that only acquires a semblance of actuality, and in fact any meaning whatsoever, due to his relation with his Origin, God.²²

Terming man the "origination of God" is an outstanding feature of the Islamic perspective. As such, it stands in opposition to the other familiar terms used to describe man. Terms such as "homo sapiens" and "homo faber" are absolute, non-relative terms that define man as an "independent" being in his own right.

Fiṭrah or origination is a special type of creation and man has been created upon nothing other than this special origination of God. Now, just as the creation of God is a uniaxial relation and connotes a relative meaning unrealisable without a bond and connection to the *axis mundi* that is God, man too is a relative being who has no reality whatsoever without this connection and bond with the Absolute.

Some of the verses of the Qur'an speak eloquently of the bond and nexus that constitutes the substance and reality of man.

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ أَنْتُمُ الْفُقَرَاءُ إِلَى اللَّهِ وَاللَّهُ هُوَ
الْغَنِيُّ الْحَمِيدُ

O mankind! You are the ones who stand in need of God, and God—He is the All-sufficient, the All-laudable.ⁱⁱ

ⁱ Qur'an, 30:30

ⁱⁱ Qur'an, 35:15

The word "needy" in this verse comes from the Arabic root F-Q-R. Its singular is *faqīr*, literally signifying a person whose spine has been broken. Such a person can only hold himself up with the support of another. Similarly, man too can only rise and subsist by taking the hand of God and being connected to Him. This connection and bond is man's very existence and actualisation. If man, in actuality, were not "needy", then he would have to be an independent existent, as there is no other logical possibility, and this is absurd. That man's neediness is a positive and existential quality for him can be seen in the prayer of Imām Ḥusayn³ (Peace be upon him) in which he refers to it as a "having" rather than a "not having". He says, "O' God. In all that I own and have I am needy (and dependent upon You), so how can I not be needy (and independent of You) in my poverty."

It is not only man whose existence is full of indigence and need. On the basis of what has thus far been covered, all that exists in the *mulk* and whatever subsists in the *malakūt* is deprived and needy and has the bond and tie with God at its crux. This is because God is not the Originator of man alone. He is the Originator of the heavens and the earth and all that they contain. All things turn to Him in their needs, as the Qur'ān says,

يَسْأَلُهُ مَنْ فِي السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ

All that is in the heavens and the earth beseeches Him...¹

He in His turn responds to them all for the above verse continues,

كُلَّ يَوْمٍ هُوَ فِي شَأْنٍ

...and at every turn He is (in response) at work.

Imām 'Alī (Peace be upon him), also speaks of the continuous subsistence of all things by God. He says, "Everything is

¹ Shaykh 'Abbās Qummī, "Du'a al-'Arafah" in *Mafātīḥ al-Jinān*.

² Qur'ān, 55:29

submissive to Him, and everything is subsisting by Him (*qāim bihi*)."¹

¹ *Nahj al-balāghah*, sermon 109

Chapter 4 – Ascent and Felicity

I. One-way Distance

Just as the descent of things to the natural world was shown to be non-physical in essence, similarly their ascent will now be shown to be of an immaterial nature. It will be demonstrated that the distance traversed in the descents and ascents of the physical world is a “two-way” or bi-directional distance, while the “distance” crossed in a descent to this world or an ascent from it involves what can be termed a “one-way” or unidirectional distance.

The water that evaporates from the ocean to rise and join the clouds and the raindrop that falls from them to melt into the sea can be said to be traversing a “two-way” distance. What this means is that the distance from the cloud to the water that has either fallen from it or strives to evaporate up to it, is exactly the same as the distance measured from the drop to the cloud. In the same way, the distance from the earth to the sun is precisely equivalent to the distance from the sun to the earth.

The above explanation of a “two-way” distance is so obvious that it may seem to be a truism, absurdity, or, at best, a platitude. But it must be remembered that the self-evident nature of a truth does not qualify it as an absurdity, devoid of meaning.

When it is said that the distance between the sun and the earth is the same as the distance between the earth and the sun, a fundamental law of nature is implied. The equidistance between two physical points in the natural world is similar to one of the most basic axioms of Euclidean geometry. This axiom states that, from any given point, only one line can be drawn that is parallel to another line. Now, if this axiom of plane geometry is not accepted, there remain only two other principles that can take its place. The first is that from any given point there is more than one line that is parallel to another line. The second is that from any given point there is no line that is parallel to another line. Each of these two princi-

ples defines a new non-Euclidean geometry that can no longer be considered as planar.ⁱ

To deny that a two-way distance exists between two things is tantamount to affirming a one-way or unidirectional one. If this is to occur without resulting in a contradiction, then the connection between the two things must be posited as being of a supra-natural order and on a higher plane. This is the type of connection that exists between the physical and metaphysical worlds.

The thing that has fallen from the spiritual world to this lower one and has the subsequent intention to ascend towards God from here, has this inclination due to its distance from the Divine Presence and from the levels above this lower one (like the *malakūt* and the *jabaraūt*). Farness or remoteness is an attribute of things that exist in nature and are governed by its laws. The origin of descent and the destination of ascent, on the other hand, is never itself far from nature and presides in its proximity. The Qur'ān, in numerous places, speaks of the journey and movement of man and the world and of their becoming near or far from Himself. For instance, in some verses the remoteness of the disbelievers and the fact that they are lost is spoken of,

بَلِ الَّذِينَ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ بِالْآخِرَةِ فِي الْعَذَابِ وَالضَّلَالِ
الْبَعِيدِ

...but those who do not believe in the Hereafter are in torment (there) and are very far astray (here in this world).ⁱⁱ

In other verses the Qur'ān calls people to reduce their distance from Him and encourages them to compete in this regard. The closest to Him are those who lead the race,

وَالسَّابِقُونَ السَّابِقُونَ أُولَئِكَ الْمُقَرَّبُونَ

ⁱ Harold E. Wolfe, *Introduction to Non-Euclidean Geometry* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston Inc., 1945).

ⁱⁱ Qur'ān, 34:8. The content in parentheses is taken from the tafsir *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 4, p. 379.

And the Foremost Ones are the foremost ones: they are the ones brought near [to God].ⁱ

While the verses of the Qur'ān refer sometimes to the proximity of God's creatures to Him, and sometimes to their distance from Him, they invariably mention His nearness to all things. For instance, in chapter *Saba'* the following expression appears at the end of verse 50,

إِنَّهُ سَمِيعٌ قَرِيبٌ

...surely He is hearing, near."ⁱⁱ

In chapter *Hūd*, the prophet Ṣāliḥ is seen speaking to the people of Thamūd,

فَاسْتَغْفِرُوهُ ثُمَّ تَوَبُوا إِلَيْهِ إِنَّ رَبِّي قَرِيبٌ مُجِيبٌ

...So plead with Him for forgiveness, then turn to Him penitently. My Lord is indeed nearmost [and] responsive."ⁱⁱⁱ

In this verse, alongside mention of the people's distance from God and a call to turn to Him and approach Him, there is the emphasis on His being all-near. In the second chapter of the Qur'ān a similar theme is to be found, "And when My servants ask you concerning Me, then surely I am very near; I answer the prayer of the suppliant when he calls on Me, so they should answer My call and believe in Me that they may walk in the right way."

In the above quoted verses the overall and total nearness of God to things was mentioned. In other verses of the Qur'ān, this is expanded upon and explained in reference to the nearness or farness of other things. For instance, in the chapter of *al-Wāqī'ah* God describes Himself as being closer to the person on his deathbed than those gathered around him.^{iv} The verse reads,

ⁱ Qur'ān, 56:10-11

ⁱⁱ Qur'ān, 34:50

ⁱⁱⁱ Qur'ān, 11:61

^{iv} Qayṣarī, *Sharḥ Fuṣūṣ al-Hikam*, p. 248.

وَنَحْنُ أَقْرَبُ إِلَيْهِ مِنْكُمْ وَلَكِنْ لَا تُبْصِرُونَ

and We are nearer to him than you are, though you do not perceive.ⁱ

In another oft-quoted verse, God says that He is closer to man than even his jugular vein.

وَلَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ وَنَعْلَمُ مَا تُوَسْوِسُ بِهِ

نَفْسُهُ وَنَحْنُ أَقْرَبُ إِلَيْهِ مِنْ حَبْلِ الْوَرِيدِ

Certainly We have created man and We know to what his soul tempts him, and We are nearer to him than his jugular vein...ⁱⁱ

In chapter *al-Anfāl*, God depicts Himself as being nearer to man than not only his life-vein, but rather, nearer than even his very heart and essence.

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا اسْتَجِيبُوا لِلَّهِ وَلِلرَّسُولِ إِذَا

دَعَاكُمْ لِمَا يُحْيِيكُمْ وَاعْلَمُوا أَنَّ اللَّهَ يَحُولُ

بَيْنَ الْمَرءِ وَقَلْبِهِ وَأَنَّهُ إِلَيْهِ تُحْشَرُونَ

O you who have faith! Answer God and the Apostle when he summons you to that which will give you life. Know that God intervenes between a man and his heart and that toward Him you will be mustered...ⁱⁱⁱ

Hence, though it may be that a man makes himself removed and distant from God, it is God who calls him to come near to Himself, while He Himself is intimate with man's most innermost being and is infinitely closer to him than his heart of hearts.

ⁱ Qur'ān, 56:85

ⁱⁱ Qur'ān, 50:16

ⁱⁱⁱ Qur'ān, 8:24

II. A Journey of Enlightenment

The movements in the physical ascents of this world take place in time and space. These movements, just like their descending counterparts, take place by *tajāfī*. Every material object in a physical ascent must pass through a certain distance in a given time, be it small or large. In an ascent from the natural world, however, such is not the case and spatio-temporal limitations are bypassed altogether. In this case the objects of ascent traverse a one-way distance, through the spiritual realms to the Divine Presence itself, without the ascent being in the physical world and of a material nature.

In certain verses of the Qur'an, there is mention, in a general, specific, and sometimes emphatic sense, of the return of things—in a movement of ascent—back to God:

وَلِلَّهِ مَا فِي السَّمَوَاتِ وَمَا فِي الْأَرْضِ وَإِلَى اللَّهِ
تُرْجَعُ الْأُمُورُ

And whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth
is God's; and to God all things return.ⁱ

اللَّهُ يَبْدُوُ الْخَلْقَ ثُمَّ يُعِيدُهُ ثُمَّ إِلَيْهِ تُرْجَعُونَ

God originates the creation, then reproduces it, then to
Him you shall be brought back.ⁱⁱ

فَسُبْحَانَ الَّذِي بِيَدِهِ مَلَكُوتُ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ وَإِلَيْهِ
تُرْجَعُونَ

So immaculate is He in whose hand is the dominion of all
things and to whom you shall be brought back.ⁱ

ⁱ Qur'an, 3:109

ⁱⁱ Qur'an, 30:11

فَقَالَ لَهَا وَلِلْأَرْضِ آتِيَا طَوْعًا أَوْ كَرْهًا قَالَتَا
 أَتَيْنَا طَائِعِينَ

...so He said to it and to the earth, 'Come both, willingly or unwillingly.' They both said, 'We come willingly.'ⁱⁱ

In addition to mentioning the cosmic movement of all things in the arc of ascent towards God, the Qur'ān gives particular attention to the meeting of man with his Lord. In the chapter of *al-Inshiqāq*, humanity is emphatically addressed in the following terms,

يَا أَيُّهَا الْإِنْسَانُ إِنَّكَ كَادِحٌ إِلَىٰ رَبِّكَ كَدْحًا
 فَمُتَّقِيهِ

O man! You are labouring toward your Lord laboriously, and you will encounter Him.ⁱⁱⁱ

It must be noted, yet again, that the above quoted verses are only a small example of those verses that speak about the inevitable return of man and the cosmos to God the Almighty.

A question may arise to the effect that, if a person wanted to meet God, how many days and what distance would he have to travel on the earth before he arrived at his goal? How far is it to the border of the spiritual world? Just as the entry of man into the natural world is not an earthly or temporal one but an entry into time and space, his ascent from the natural world is likewise an escape from the lower world. This ascent, like the preceding descent, is outside of the spatio-temporal domain and space and time in this journey are things that must be crossed and left behind. Hence the wayfarer of this path, by surpassing the spatio-temporal conditions of the contingent realm, reaches horizons and worlds that encompass and com-

ⁱ Qur'ān, 36:83

ⁱⁱ Qur'ān, 41:11

ⁱⁱⁱ Qur'ān, 84:6

prehend this realm. Consequently, this allows him to be closer to nature than he was while in it as this new world is closer to nature than nature is to itself. Man, during his meeting with God, enters the Holy presence of the Lord Who is equally and infinitely near to the kingdom hereunder (*mulk*) and the dominion of the spirits (*malakūt*).

The ascent from the temporal world to the station that encompasses and comprehends (*muḥīt*) it, does not entail any physical displacement (*tajāfī*), and such a thing is not even plausible. In this type of journey, one in which a one-way distance is traversed, the movement is towards a reality that is in all conditions already near to the traveller. This can be likened to the blind person, who in the process of regaining his vision, makes a figurative journey towards sight and light—the latter being something that he was perpetually surrounded by. Now, God is the light of the heavens and the earth,¹ and so the wayfarer on the path to God is like the blind man in the above example—inundated by light, he is unable to see because his eyes are closed. To see the light is to remove the veils that cover his eyes.

In the arc of ascent, man searches for that thing which he has lost—for that Being, ubiquitously present in the universe and through Whose presence the cosmos subsists. Without It, man cannot exist, let alone endure. The misguided try to locate that Reality—which is neither spatial nor temporal and, in fact, comprehends them—by turning to other beings that are themselves lost and inexorably tied to the limitations of space and time. The guided, on the other hand, do not resort to others in their search. Rather, they turn towards the Reality that is always with them and that which they already possess; the Reality that is near to them, but from Whom they are distant.

Man's ascension is a journey in knowledge and enlightenment. The path that leads from ignorance to knowledge is not a material one subsisting in time and space. Now, if a student travels to different places and spends many years in the acqui-

¹ Qur'ān, 24:35

sition of knowledge, this is only to meet the material prerequisites of the acquisition. Once the ground is ready and the conditions are met, knowledge is arrived at independently of time and space.

In attempting to portray the spiritual journey of the wayfarer on the path, however, the above analogy of a journey from ignorance to knowledge lacks in lucidity. This is because the ignorant person apparently gains something in the end that he did not have to begin with. The wayfarer on the path of perfection, on the other hand, as he enters the spiritual realms or finally comes into the Divine Presence Itself, arrives at a Reality that was with him to begin with. This Reality gives subsistence to man when the latter depends upon and is connected to It.

The spiritual wayfarer is not like a runner who seeks water in the desert. The runner, once he arrives at the well in the oasis, has found something that he did not have at the start. The wayfarer of the path to God is more like a fish in the sea. It is only when the fish reaches the mountain spring that feeds the sea that it becomes aware of the reality that had been there from the beginning; surrounding it all along, supporting and helping it and teaching it how to move.¹

Another similitude for man's ascension is what might be called a journey from oblivion and forgetfulness (*ghaflah*) to awareness and recollection (*tanabbuh*). Moreover, if the way from ignorance to knowledge is, as Plato has put forward, based upon recollecting and remembering, then this too becomes an appropriate example for the ascension in question.

In the journey from oblivion to awareness, man moves toward a reality that he had the knowledge of from the outset and which he originally possessed. It was only that he had forgotten this and had become unaware.

Some verses of the Qur'ān explicitly characterize man's ascent to the higher realms as a movement from forgetfulness to awareness, while others warn of his obliviousness concerning

¹ Qayṣarī, *Sharḥ Fuṣūṣ al-Hikam*, p. 25.

the inevitable meeting with his Lord. In the chapter of *Qāf*, man is blamed for being oblivious of the Resurrection:

لَقَدْ كُنْتَ فِي غَفْلَةٍ مِّنْ هَذَا فَكَشَفْنَا عَنْكَ
غِطَاءَكَ فَبَصَرُكَ الْيَوْمَ حَدِيدٌ

You were certainly oblivious of this. We have removed your veil from you, and so your sight is acute today.ⁱ

What is being implied in the above verse is that this Resurrection will not just take place on the Last Day—ushered in by the sound of a trumpet—but rather, that it is taking place right now, and the moment of entry into it is the moment when the veil of forgetfulness and oblivion is lifted from the eyes of people and not from the Resurrection itself. Other verses speak of the presence, *in act*, of hell and its actual engulfment of those who are not believers,

وَإِنَّ جَهَنَّمَ لَمُحِيطَةٌ بِالْكَافِرِينَ

...and most surely hell encompasses the disbelievers.ⁱⁱ

In some traditions there is also mention of the fact that heaven and hell have already been created and that they presently exist. 'Abd al-Salām ibn Ṣāliḥ Harawī has reported that he once said to the Imām 'Alī ibn Mūsā,²⁴ upon whom be Peace, "Tell me, have Paradise and the Fire been created now?" The Imām answered, "Yes, when the Prophet, upon him and his Family be Peace, went upon his nocturnal ascension he entered Paradise and had a sighting of the Fire."

'Abd al-Salām said, "There is a group of people who say that those two do not exist yet and that they are in God's decree."

The Imām then said, "This group is not of us and we are not with them. Whoever denies the fact that heaven and hell have been created has indeed belied the Prophet, God's blessing be upon him and his progeny, and us. God has said, 'This

ⁱ Qur'ān, 50:22

ⁱⁱ Qur'ān, 9:49

is the hell that the guilty belied; they wander (in bewilderment) between it and between its boiling waters." The Prophet, God's blessing be upon him and his progeny, has also said, 'Heaven is nearer to you than your sandal-strap, and hell is the same.'"ⁱⁱⁱ

The journey that believers and disbelievers²² make in their ascension to the dominion above (*malakūt*) and the meeting with God is a movement towards a reality that is not conditioned by material time and space, but rather, encompasses them and nature as a whole. While in nature they are heedless of it and when they reach this reality it is said to them that nothing new has taken place, the only thing that has happened is that the blinds that once covered their eyes have been removed. To be sure, Reality is not covered by any veils. The veils and impediments to the traveller are, in actuality, due to himself. The movement of the wayfarer on the path then is nothing but the tearing away of his own veils. The eschatological event, then, is merely the sharpening of insight, the removal of forgetfulness, and the perfection of awareness.

III. Understanding Unity

If man's journey to God is a spiritual ascent and a journey of knowledge and enlightenment, then the question naturally arises, how is knowledge of the spiritual realities, and indeed God Himself, to be attained? In answering this question, the foregoing discussion regarding the descent of existents into nature is invaluable. In explaining the eighth characteristic of things that descend to the material sphere, it was said that indigence constitutes the reality of things that have descended by *tajallī*. The reality of these things is nothing other than their relation and bond with the origin of descent.

The inclusion of indigence and relationality into the very fabric and reality of things that have descended from the Divine Presence means that the knowledge of these things is intimately tied to the knowledge of their origin, and in actuality, the two are inseparable. But if the descent were by *tajāfī*, then

ⁱ Qur'ān, 55:43-44

ⁱⁱ Fayḍ Kāshānī, *Ilm al-Yaqīn*, vol. 2, p. 1009.

the object of descent is knowable independently of its origin. In this case, even after the descent has occurred, the knowledge of the origin is irrelevant to the knowledge of the descended thing. This is because no trace of the descended object remains in the origin from which it started out and vice versa. In the descent by *tajallī*, however, the archetype of the object of descent remains intact in the origin, and the object of descent on its own level becomes limited such that it is nothing but a need for and connection to the origin.

The human mind derives concepts such as "created", "originated", "made", and "existent" from the descended thing. Actually, the mind is making use of these concepts to signify their referent, which—as has been previously shown—is nothing other than the relational meanings of "creation", "origination", "making" and "causing to exist".

The concrete reality of the world, indicated by such concepts as "creation" and being of a relational and *ishrāqī* nature, can be likened to the prepositions of grammar. Prepositional (*harfī*) clauses are contrasted to substantive (*ismī*) ones, in that the latter can be cognized by referring to their essence, while the former are meaningful only when related to a substantive clause. Whenever the substantive, whose relation to another substantive or verb is signified by the preposition, is changed, the signification of the preposition also changes.

Every preposition, from its own distinct perspective, reveals one particular aspect and meaning of a substantive. For example, the two words "from" and "to" in the sentence, "I went from the house to the school," are two words that signify two prepositional meanings. These two words acquire meaning and relevance only after being related and joined to the words "house" and "school". Furthermore, in their signification, these prepositions take into consideration only certain facets and dimensions of the house and the school in question.

Every existent in nature is connected to the spiritual dominion—*malakūt*—and every spiritual reality in the latter is, in turn, bonded with the invincible world of *jabarūt*. All things that have descended from the Divine Presence are in their essence connected to and related to God. Due to the exis-

tence of this existential continuum and hypostasis, every point on the earth and every moment of time becomes an aperture opening up to the *malakūt* and the *jabarūt*. In the end all things become the signs (*āyāt*) of God. Relational and prepositional meanings take shape only in view of the substantive meanings supporting them, and the relation in question—from its own angle—exposes yet another face of the substantive. In the same way, if the reality of every existent of nature is perceived, new windows to the unseen and esoteric worlds are opened for the observer. Hence, it can be concluded that whenever a thing in nature is glanced upon without there then being a consequent new insight gained about its spiritual origins, then the glance and the vision is not real and is attended by forgetfulness and oblivion (*ghaflah*).

Because the Qur'ān sees all of creation—including man himself—as fundamentally attached to the Divinity, it refers to them as the signs of God.

وَجَعَلْنَا اللَّيْلَ وَالنَّهَارَ آيَاتَيْنِ

And We made the night and the day to be two signs...ⁱ,
and in another verse,

إِنَّ فِي خَلْقِ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَآخْتِلَافِ اللَّيْلِ
وَالنَّهَارِ لَآيَاتٍ لِّأُولِي الْأَلْبَابِ

Surely in the creation of the heavens and the earth and the
alteration of the night and the day are signs for a people
who reflect.ⁱⁱ

In the Islamic perspective, because every existent is a sign of God, it is also called a “name” of God. This is because a name is a label that indicates the named.

In the first logical division, a name is divided into the two divisions of real and arbitrary. An arbitrary name is one that is established by persons and is dependent upon their mutual

ⁱ Qur'ān, 17:12

ⁱⁱ Qur'ān, 3:190

agreement upon it. A real name, on the other hand, is independent of people and existentially points to a reality subsisting outside of itself.

The arbitrary name is itself divided into two components, namely, oral and written. Take, for example, the names "Daniel" and "Adam". The oral name for Daniel is "Daniel" when it is audibly pronounced. The written name for Adam is "Adam" when it is written or recorded in a visible and communicable format (i.e. in an established language such as Arabic or English).

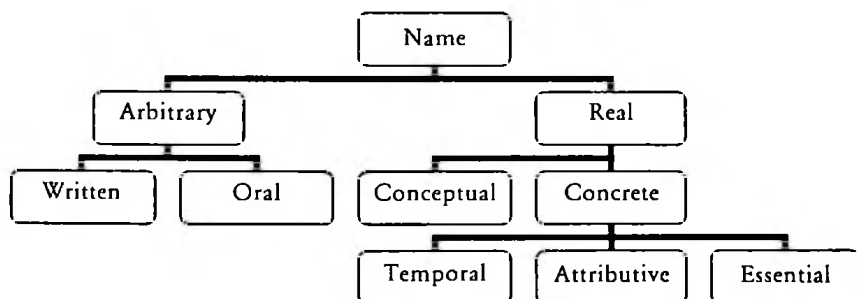
The real name is also divided into two: conceptual and concrete. The conceptual name is, for example, the mental picture resulting in the mind when the words "water" and "aqua" are pronounced, or when "earth" and "soil" are repeated. While from the perspective of different cultures and languages, arbitrary names can differ from one another, a conceptual name is the same in all languages and is independent of the agreement or ratification of people and is in fact existential.

To show the difference between these two types of names, Maulānā Rūmī²⁶ recounts the parable of the four men who wanted to buy some fruit that would satisfy their hunger. Each one of them, in his own tongue, named the fruit of his choice. The first said that he wanted "angūr", the second "i-nab", the third "ūzūm" and the fourth "istāfil". These four names were arbitrary-oral names that had been established according to the dynamics and variations implicit within human language. Because they were apparently different names, the four men erroneously thought that they wanted four separate things. A fifth man knew all four languages and, upon hearing the four oral names brought to mind their conceptual names and came to the conclusion that the concept that the four men had in their minds was indeed a single concept. He took their money and purchased the one fruit that they all had pictured together in their minds.^{1 27}

¹ Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī, *Mathnawī e Ma'nawī*, vol. 2, line 3681.

The concrete name is another type of real name. The referent in this case is not, as in the conceptual name, a concept or mental idea. Rather the referent is the actualized existent, existing, *in concreto*, in external reality. For example, the image that exists in a mirror is a signpost and name—so to speak—of the person being reflected in the mirror. The indication in this case is neither arbitrary-oral nor arbitrary-written, nor is it real-conceptual. It is, rather, real-concrete.²⁸ For instance, the fact that green foliage indicates the very real presence of water means that the indication is neither mental nor arbitrary. On the contrary, it is a real and concrete indication. This means that greenery is a real and concrete name for water.

Real and concrete names can be subdivided into temporal, attributive and essential categories. A temporal or attributive indication is one that applies only at certain times or under certain conditions. The essential indication is one that holds under all conditions and in all states. The indication of greenery for water is an attributive indication, in that it holds true only when the green plants are healthy. If the plants dry up due to some pestilence, however, they do not indicate the presence of water. On the other hand, the world being an indication and sign of God, is an example of a real-concrete-essential indication. This is because the world, in its essence, and in all of its states of being, is a name and sign of God.ⁱ



ⁱ 'Abdullah Jawādī Āmulī, *Ma'rifatshināsi dar Qur'ān* (Qum: Markaz e Nashr Isrā', 1378), 347.

IV. Awareness of Reality

It has been shown that the substantive essence of all things in nature is their relation and bond with the higher realms and ultimately, with God Himself. Furthermore, every entity is a divine sign and a name among the names of God. Hence, it may be concluded that every existent, by knowing its reality and essence, comes to know one of the names and signs of God. Now, because the journey and ascent to God is a journey of knowledge and enlightenment, the wayfarer on the path moves from oblivion towards awareness. In this way, every person, by coming to know his own essence and soul, traverses the distance between himself and God.

That the knowledge of God is inherent to and concomitant with the knowledge of the essence of every existent is affirmed by the oft-quoted tradition, "He who knows his self knows his Lord."ⁱ The fact that every person approaches God via his own soul and reality, and that the soul of every man is a way unto God, is mentioned in a saying, "The ways to God are as many as the number of the souls of created beings."ⁱⁱ

Because relationality and connectedness is the very crux of created things, the true knowledge of their "own" essences is not prior to their knowledge in relation to and of God. That is to say, it is not the case that man—or any other created being—first comes to know himself and then goes on from there, using rational proofs or arguments and their like, to prove the existence of God. If it were so, then it would mean that man must first know the relational and prepositional meaning of his own existence—independent of the source or first term of the relation—and then make this the means for knowing God. But this cannot be because, as was shown, the relational and prepositional meaning is only a consequence of the substantive or first term that supports it.

The relation to and bond with God is the *sine qua non* of all contingent existents. As such, knowledge of these existents is

ⁱ Āmirī, *Ghurar al-Hikam wa Durar al-Kalim*, p. 232 The Arabic reads, "*man 'arafa nafsahu faqad 'arafa rabbahu*".

ⁱⁱ Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 64, p. 137.

inseparable from knowledge of God and in fact, the former is both a derivative and corollary of the latter. The same can be said regarding that which is the opposite of knowledge—ignorance, and its underlying principle of oblivion and forgetfulness. In the human sphere, then, when a person forgets God, his soul is forgotten. The Qur'an refers to this ontological link and expresses the priority of knowing God to knowing the soul in the following way:

وَلَا تَكُونُوا كَالَّذِينَ نَسُوا اللَّهَ فَأَنْسَاهُمْ أَنْفُسَهُمْ

And do not be like those who forget God, so He makes them forget their own souls...ⁱ

Knowledge of the soul of man, and indeed, of all of creation—which has no reality other than being a sign and indicator of its originating principle—is nothing other than the knowledge of the signs and names of God. The Qur'an affirms this concurrence between the knowledge of God and the knowledge of the soul in the following way:

وَإِذْ أَخَذَ رَبُّكَ مِنْ بَنِي آدَمَ مِنْ ظُهُورِهِمْ ذُرِّيَّتَهُمْ
وَأَشْهَدَهُمْ عَلَى أَنْفُسِهِمْ أَلَسْتُ بِرَبِّكُمْ قَالُوا بَلَىٰ
شَهِدْنَا

When your Lord took from the Children of Adam, from their loins, their descendants and made them bear witness over themselves, [He said to them,] 'Am I not your Lord?'

They said, 'Yes indeed! We bear witness.'ⁱⁱ

What God showed to the sons of Adam was their own selves, and what He asked them about was His Lordship. This can be understood if it is remembered that man is, in reality, nothing other than a sign and a pointer. Just as is in the case of the image in the mirror that was mentioned previously, the

ⁱ Qur'ān, 59:19

ⁱⁱ Qur'ān, 7:172

indication of the sign is real and concrete, signifying a type of ontological identity between the sign and the Signified.

These ontological signs (*āyāt al-takwīnī*) are just like the names whose divisions and types were covered in the foregoing discussion, in that some of them are temporary and attributive, while others are permanent and essential. The temporary and attributive signs, such as grass which signifies the presence of water only when it has the attribute of life and health, are contrasted to the essential signs which signify the reality that they point to at all times and in all states. Creation, in relation to God, is of this latter type. This is so because there is no existent—irrespective of its state of activity and attribute or the aspect of its essence that is considered—that is not related and connected to God. For in every existing thing, all of its dimensions are actualised by this link and bond that it has with God, upon Whom it depends for its continued subsistence. Hence, it can be concluded that created existents are signs, names, indicators and manifestations of God in all their states of being, and furthermore, that knowing any one of them in its reality and essence leads to the knowledge of God. If the existent in question has a conscious nature, then its self-knowledge also becomes knowledge of God. When man is ignorant of the indigence and relationality that constitutes the very reality, essence and actuality of created things and sees them as independent existents, then he does not really see them, and consequently, remains ignorant of them and their Cause. The same applies to man himself. When man remains oblivious of the sheer need and deprivation that compose his reality and sees himself to be existing in his own right, without any essential dependencies, then not only does he not know himself but he also does not know—and cannot know—God.

Man only really knows himself when he puts aside his myopic tendency to see things as self-contained and himself as independent. He starts to see himself as nothing but a sign and indicator pointing to the self-sufficient and all independent God. When such an understanding is acquired, a porthole is opened up in man's limited reality that leads to and has as its horizon the infinite and limitless realm of the Divine Pres-

ence.ⁱ If man, in a migration from self, succeeds in abstaining from selfishness and a self-seeking myopia, then the greatest veil and obstacle that stands in his path to a meeting with the Almighty is removed.

V. Seeing the Face of God

By tearing away the veil of the ego, what becomes manifest is nothing but the sign, name and face of God. Needless to say, none of the creatures are capable of apprehending the very essence of God like He himself can. The divine heavens are infinite, boundless reaches of being that comprehend and encompass all of creation—and every single created thing is as an aperture opening up into that fathomless expanse.

If the aperture is not regarded in itself and in isolation, it furnishes—from its own particular angle of vision—a magnificent view of an infinite horizon. Nevertheless, no single aperture can apprehend the totality of the Reality—the infinite infinities—in the way that He Himself, beyond the apertures, can. It is for this reason that Imām ‘Alī, Peace be upon him, having said, “I have not seen anything but that I have seen God before it”ⁱⁱ, also said, “Neither the highest intellectual aspirations, nor the deepest scrutinizations of the mind are able to reach Him (in His Essence).”ⁱⁱⁱ

After obliterating all of the impediments, and finally, removing the greatest of all veils—that of egoism—the soul sees the signs of God and embarks upon its beatific vision. On the Day of Resurrection—the day when the Truth will become manifest—all things will undergo a total annihilation in time and essence, and only the face of God will endure and become apparent for all to see. To quote the Qur’ān,

ⁱ ‘Abdullah Jawādī Āmulī, *Ma‘rifatshināsī dar Qur’ān* (Qum: Markaz e Nashr Isrā’, 1378), 348.

ⁱⁱ Fayd Kāshānī, *‘Ilm al-Yaqīn*, vol. 1, p. 95.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Nahj al-balāghah*, sermon 1.

كُلُّ مَنْ عَلَيْهَا فَانٍ وَيَبْقَىٰ وَجْهُ رَبِّكَ ذُو الْجَلَالِ
وَالْإِكْرَامِ

Everything on it is annihilated. And there will remain the face of your Lord, having majesty and honour.ⁱ

In the above verses, the word “annihilated” or *fān* is a derived word (*mushtaq*), and no such word primarily indicates the future tense, that is, unless the context calls for it. In this particular case, there is no grammatical or conceptual pretext for taking the meaning in the future tense and, hence, the past tense must be used. The meaning of the first verse, then, is that all things are in a state of annihilation and nothingness even now, and what takes place at the time of Resurrection is merely the unmasking of this present but hidden reality. All that is not God will be shown on that day to be essentially in a state of annihilation. In the second verse, the clause “having majesty and honour” is not attributed to “Lord”; rather it is attributed to “face”. If this were not so then, according to the rules of Arabic grammar, the verse should have read *dha al-jalāli wa al-ikrām*, instead of its correct and current reading of *dhu al-jalāli wa al-ikrām*. The “face” of God, then, will remain in all of its glory on that day. This signifies that it is with this face that the meeting with God takes place. The awareness and sudden knowledge of the resurrected person will be in regards to this face of his Lord. This is tantamount to saying that every person, from the particular aperture of his own reality, will be raised to meet a specific face of God, Who is the Lord of all the worlds.

As can be inferred from the verse,

فَأَيْنَمَا تُولَؤُا فَتَمَّ وَجْهُ اللَّهِ

...whichever way you turn, there is the face of God!...,ⁱⁱ

ⁱ Qur'ān, 55:26-27

ⁱⁱ Qur'ān, 2:115

God comprehends and encompasses all things and is infinite in relation to them. Every person, in his ascension towards God, by the essential annihilation of his self, comes to meet the face of God. Now, this annihilation—termed “extinctive annihilation” (*fanā al-istahlākī*)—does not mean complete non-existence. Rather, it means that the thing undergoing annihilation is becoming aware of the reality of its essence, which is nothing but a relation and bond with the Reality and has no **independent** existence of its own. Hence, during the meeting with the Lord, every soul looks upon His face from the particular angle of the aperture of his reality and existence. In its turn, the face of God, through precisely the same aspect of relationship and connection that it has with the created soul, is responsible for the soul’s cultivation and care. So, every soul from its special existential vantage point sees the face of God as its Lord and Caretaker. Every soul, no matter to what limited extent it draws upon the grace of God, when seeing the face of God is interacting with a limitless and infinite reality. The boundless nature of this reality means that it is present everywhere, and hence, the soul that sees the face of God sees it in all places and at all times. “And wheresoever you turn, there is the face of God....”

The vision of the face of God, in all of its aspects, is nothing other than the vision of the true face of the world. This is because all things in the world are essentially only the signs of God. Hence, if someone were to remove the veil of self-centeredness and become aware of the face of God, not only would he come to know his own reality but in addition he would know the reality of the whole world. In other words, the impediment that prevents one from seeing the divine nature of man is not in the world outside, but rather it is in man. The veil and impediment arises when one looks upon oneself in an independent manner—as if the self were a self-contained reality—and on the moral plane, when one is selfish. To quote Ḥāfiz, “Ḥāfiz, you, yourself are the veil for the self; move then from the midst!”

For the wayfarer on the path, whenever the veil of self-centeredness is removed by virtue of his journeying upon the

path, not only the divine nature of man, but also the divine nature of the world is disclosed to him as a part of the beatific vision. Self-regard conceals the divine face, but its vision, when achieved, is found to be ubiquitous. This veil is in man—the microcosm. Its removal opens the doors to the cosmos and makes apparent its brilliance, which is nothing but the brilliance of the perfect man—the macrocosm.

VI. Direct Knowledge (*ʿIlm al-Ḥuḍūrī*)

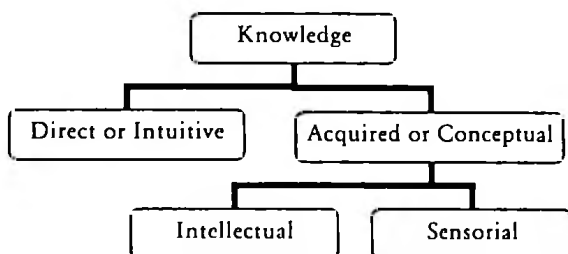
The ascent of a thing from nature does not take place in time and space. For man, it is an odyssey of knowledge and enlightenment, from oblivion to awareness, and towards the goal of a beatific vision. The latter involves self-awareness and knowledge of one's soul. The question at hand, then, is this: How is this knowledge of the soul to be acquired?

The knowledge of the soul, which was seen to be concomitant with the knowledge of the Lord, is called the "most useful of knowledges" by Imām 'Alī, upon whom be Peace. This knowledge, which comprises the felicity of man, is not an acquired or conceptual knowledge; rather it is a direct knowledge or a knowledge by presence. At first, knowledge by presence is accompanied by a change in both perspective and interpretation of the world, and is followed in suit by a transition and transfiguration of the world itself.

In the act of categorizing the divisions of knowledge, knowledge is first divided into acquired (*ḥuṣūlī*) and direct (*ḥuḍūrī*).ⁱ Acquired knowledge is the knowledge that is obtained by means of concepts and rational thinking and is, thus, sometimes called "conceptual knowledge." If a man comes to acknowledge the existence of something by way of thought and conceptualisation, or when he affirms something by way of logical arguments, he is involving himself with acquired knowledge. The latter is further divided into two types: sensorial and intellectual.

ⁱ Āmirī, *Ghurar al-Ḥikam wa Durar al-Kalim*, p. 232.

ⁱⁱ Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *Nihāyat al-Ḥikmah*, p. 211.



Acquired-sensorial knowledge is obtained by means of the concepts of sensorial particulars. When a tree is perceived with the naked eye, the knowledge of that tree is conceptual-sensorial. This is because in this type of knowledge, the concept and mental picture is acquired by way of the senses. Acquired-intellectual knowledge, on the other hand, makes use of the concepts of universals. When the existence of the spiritual world or of the Divine Treasures is proven using arguments of formal logic, for instance, the resultant knowledge is of the acquired-intellectual type.

Direct knowledge is a knowledge whereby the known, without the intermediation of concepts, is made "present" to the knower; hence it is also referred to as "knowledge by presence". This type of knowledge is nearer to the idea of "having" than "knowing." A person can have knowledge of things such as pain, anxiety, peacefulness, love and the like by way of both conceptual knowledge and direct knowledge. If he knows pain in a conceptual way then he can have knowledge of it without feeling it—just as when he calls to mind the pain that he had sometime in the past. But the person that has a direct knowledge of pain, is in pain. The person in severe pain, who is woken from his sleep due to it, does not awaken due to the concept or thought of pain; rather he wakes up because of the pain itself and the direct knowledge that he has of it.

Whenever a person wants to have direct knowledge of something, he must change and transform the modality of his reality and existence. For acquired knowledge, on the other hand, this is not the case. Acquired knowledge, as the name evinces, is acquired through pedagogical methods of study and

education and revolves around conceptions and confirmations (*taṣdīqāt*). Now, as direct knowledge requires an alternation in the very being of the knower, its tools and means are such things as self-purification, self-perfection and transcendence. In this way, every new stage of knowledge by presence is attended by a new presence and aspect of Being for the knower, and as such, heralding in a new stage in his life.

The quintessential fact in the knowledge of the reality of the human soul is that this knowledge is of neither the acquired nor conceptual type. For if it were of the sensorial branch of conceptual knowledge, then only the physical and outer aspects of the body could be known. On the other hand, if it were of the intellectual type, it would soon be discovered that conceptual and rational thought processes are sterile in this regard and do not shed any light on the substantive reality of the self. The truth is that man witnesses himself without any mediation whatsoever.¹

Using intellectual knowledge and methods two things are easily understood: First, that there is such a thing as direct or "witnessed" (*shuhūdī*) knowledge that is the root and base of all conceptual knowledge; second, that the sensorial and rational faculty is incapable of knowing the soul. The conclusion is that knowledge of self is only had by a wayfaring on the path of witnessing and spiritual intuition.

Ibn Sīnā in his *Shifā* and *al-Ishārāt wa al-Tanbīhāt*, Khājah Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī in his commentary on the latter, and Mullā Ṣadrā in some of his works, all by way of logical argumentation, conclude that man's conceptual—and hence mediated—knowledge can be traced back to direct and unmediated knowledge. Furthermore, they add that man's knowledge of the mediating concepts is a direct knowledge. Hence, every conceptual element of knowledge finds its genesis in a witnessing, and furthermore, direct or witnessed knowledge is the root of all acquired knowledge. This is due to the fact that, in the process of gaining conceptual knowledge, the knower proceeds from an acquaintance of the concept to the knowledge of the

¹ Ibn Sīnā, *al-Ishārāt wa al-Tanbīhāt*. Commentary by Khājah Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī, vol. 2, p. 294.

known entity. It follows, then, that in the acquired or conceptual knowledge of a thing, one must first come to know the concept or idea of that thing. Now, contemplation on man's knowledge of a concept or idea leads to the conclusion that this knowledge cannot be by way of another intermediary concept, and thus, that it must be direct and immediate. That is to say, the concepts by which man gets acquired knowledge are witnessed by him directly and are unmediated.

Suhrawardī²⁹ puts forth two proofs to show that man's knowledge of himself is not an acquired type of knowledge.ⁱ To summarize, he says: The soul of every person is a particular and every person knows his own soul to be an individual and particularized reality. On the other hand, it is a fact that conceptual knowledge is always a universal. Hence, man's knowledge of himself is neither a conceptual nor an acquired knowledge. The second proof can be outlined as follows: The soul of a person is present and is the first-person. However, the idea of "I", *qua concept*, is not present with the person but is, as it were, present in the third-person. Hence, the concept of "I" can even be thought of as an "it". But this is not like the knowledge of the self for the self, and so self-knowledge can be neither conceptual nor acquired. That every person is present to himself and can know himself without the need of any intermediary is borne out by the following verse:

بَلِ الْإِنْسَانُ عَلَىٰ نَفْسِهِ بَصِيرَةٌ

Rather man is a witness to himself.ⁱⁱ

It was previously shown that the ascent to the spiritual realms and towards God is a journey of knowledgeⁱⁱⁱ that is accomplished by knowing the self and the reality of the existent in question. Now it has also been shown that knowledge of the self is neither a conceptual nor an acquired knowledge, but rather, that it arises through a witnessing and seeing. Be-

ⁱ Shahāb al-Dīn Yaḥyā Suhrawardī, *al-Talwīḥāt: Majmū'eh Muṣanifāt Shaykh Ishrāq*, vol. 1, p. 70-71.

ⁱⁱ Qur'ān, 75:14

ⁱⁱⁱ See chapter 4, part II.

cause knowledge by witnessing and presence is given to stages and degrees that are traversed by self-purification and practical wayfaring, the wayfarer on the path must pass through many ontological transformations of station and state. Every new knowledge, if that knowledge is to be true, is necessarily accompanied by a real change and new stage in the life of the wayfarer.

The person on the arc of ascent who has reached the spiritual world can see his own imaginal form in the isthmus that he has passed. By virtue of this seeing, a new stage of being and becoming is ushered in. The person who has gone even further and who, through reaching the invincible world has become aware of the Divine Treasures, lives an elevated life that can only be described as divine.¹

The Qur'ān, in denying the corporeality of man's ascension and affirming its noetic cum ontological nature, goes on to vividly describe the transformations and metamorphoses that occur in the reality and being of things during the ascension. In some verses, it speaks of these changes as a passing from one plane of reality to another.

عَلَىٰ أَنْ تُبَدِّلَ أَمْثَلَكُمْ وَنُنشِئَكُمْ فِي مَا لَا تَعْلَمُونَ
وَلَقَدْ عَلِمْتُمُ النَّشْأَةَ الْأُولَىٰ فَلَوْلَا تَذَكَّرُونَ

...and recreating you in [a realm] you do not know. Certainly you have known the first genesis, then why do you not take admonition?²

An all-embracing transformation of all existents is mentioned in chapter *Ibrāhīm*,

يَوْمَ تُبَدِّلُ الْأَرْضَ غَيْرَ الْأَرْضِ وَالسَّمَوَاتِ
وَبَرَزُوا لِلَّهِ الْوَاحِدِ الْقَهَّارِ

¹ Mullā Ṣadrā, *al-Hikmat al-Muta'aliyah*, vol. 9, pp. 153, 283.

² Qur'ān, 56:61-62

The day the earth is transformed into another earth and the heavens [as well], and they are presented before God, the One, the All-paramount.ⁱ

In another chapter, the result of such a transformation is mentioned,

وَأَشْرَقَتِ الْأَرْضُ بِنُورِ رَبِّهَا وَوُضِعَ الْكِتَابُ
وَجِئَءَ بِالنَّبِيِّينَ وَالشُّهَدَاءِ وَقُضِيَ بَيْنَهُم بِالْحَقِّ
وَهُمْ لَا يُظْلَمُونَ وَوُفِّيَتْ كُلُّ نَفْسٍ مَّا عَمِلَتْ
وَهُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِمَا يَفْعَلُونَ

And the earth will glow with the light of her Lord, and the Book will be set up, and the prophets and the witnesses will be brought, and judgment will be made between them justly, and they will not be wronged. Every soul will be recompensed fully for what it has done, and He is best aware of what they do.ⁱⁱ

VII. Effort and Action

Every person traverses the path of ascent towards God by way of his own being. That is, every person makes the journey to the higher realms from the matrix of his existence and reality. Man travels through the imaginal, spiritual and invincible worlds, until the final meeting with God. He does this by way of self-knowledge, this being essentially nothing other than becoming.

Man's outer existence pertains to the material realm and is conditioned by the limits of space and time. His inner existence—and reality—on the other hand, is not delimited in this

ⁱ Qur'ān, 14:48

ⁱⁱ Qur'ān, 39:69-70

manner. In this corporeal world, a man who remains ignorant of the reality of his self and the surrounding world thinks that every act of his is limited to the time and space in which it was performed and ceases to exist outside of it. He reckons that the days come and go, never to return again.³⁰ Now, the passage of time and the flow of events have to do with the outer aspects of worldly life. This outer, composed of the ephemeral phenomena of physical bodies and the acts and deeds of daily life, also has an inner aspect that constitutes the path of man's ascension.

Man makes and creates his inner being and reality by his actions in this world. This actualisation of the reality of man occurs through his efforts, as the Qur'ān affirms,

وَأَنْ لَّيْسَ لِلْإِنْسَانِ إِلَّا مَا سَعَى

Man shall have nothing but what he strives for.¹

The upward movement of the person undergoing ascent begins with his efforts and continues with the same. In the first stage, and with his first step outside the physical domain, the imaginal forms of his deeds become apparent to him. This is the level that is sometimes referred to as the "embodiment of deeds" (*tajassum al-'amāl*). In the final stage also, the stage in which the name "the Real" (*al-Haq*) manifests itself, the inner reality of man and the result of his actions become apparent.

Everything that is in the world is nothing but a sign and name of God, and that which man attains by his worldly actions and efforts is no exception to this universal principle. It is for this reason that on the day of Resurrection—the day when the truth is revealed to all—every person will be raised with and by the reality of his own existence, or equivalently, by a name among the names and a sign among the signs of God. If what he has done in this life is in accordance with God's pleasure and will, then on the day of resurrection, he will be raised with the inner form of his actions or—to say the same thing—the name "the Pleased". His beatific vision in this case will be one of pleasure and ecstasy. But if, on the other hand,

¹ Qur'ān, 53:39

his efforts were not for God's pleasure and instead called for God's wrath and anger, then on judgment day he will be raised with the name "the Avenger" or "the Retributor".

With the advent, or more accurately, disclosure of Resurrection, not only does man see the reality of his natural and physical existence but also sees his state in the isthmus. If he is of those meant for heaven, then he apprehends that the intermediary heaven is one of the signs of the mercy and bounty of God. But if he is of those meant for hell, then he becomes aware that the intermediary and imaginal state is a brandishing flame from the fire of God's wrath and anger. He actually sees the fire and knows it to be from his own existence, engulfing his very heart and in continuum with hell-fire itself.

نَارُ اللَّهِ الْمَوْقَدَةُ الَّتِي تَطَّلُعُ عَلَى الْأَفْئِدَةِ

[It is] the fire of God, set ablaze, which will overspread the hearts.ⁱ

In many verses of the Qur'ān the pivotal role of the worldly actions and deeds of people in the genesis of heaven and hell and its modality is mentioned. In verses such as:

يَوْمَ تَجِدُ كُلُّ نَفْسٍ مَّا عَمِلَتْ مِنْ خَيْرٍ مُخَضَّرًا
وَمَا عَمِلَتْ مِنْ سُوءٍ تَوَدُّ لَوْ أَنَّ بَيْنَهَا وَبَيْنَهُ أَمَدًا
بَعِيدًا

The day when every soul will find present whatever good it has done; and as to whatever evil it has done it will wish there were a far distance between it and itself...ⁱⁱ

وَتُؤْفَىٰ كُلُّ نَفْسٍ مَّا عَمِلَتْ وَهُمْ لَا يُظْلَمُونَ

...Every soul shall find in full what it has done, and they shall not be dealt with unjustly.^{i 31}

ⁱ Qur'ān, 104:6-7

ⁱⁱ Qur'ān, 3:30

زَعَمَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا أَنْ لَنْ يُبْعَثُوا قُلْ بَلَىٰ وَرَبِّي
لَتُبْعَثُنَّ ثُمَّ لَتُنَبَّؤُنَّ بِمَا عَمِلْتُمْⁱ

The faithless claim that they will not be resurrected. Say,
‘Yes, by my Lord, you will surely be resurrected; then you
will surely be informed of what you did...’ⁱⁱ

وَلِكُلِّ دَرَجَةٌ مِمَّا عَمِلُواⁱⁱⁱ

For everyone there are ranks in accordance with what they
have done...ⁱⁱⁱ

وَوَجَدُوا مَا عَمِلُوا حَاضِرًا وَلَا يَظْلِمُ رَبُّكَ أَحَدًا

...They will find present whatever they had done, and your
Lord does not wrong anyone.^{iv}

وَيَوْمَ يُرْجَعُونَ إِلَيْهِ فَيُنَبِّئُهُم بِمَا عَمِلُوا^v

...And the day they are brought back to Him He will in-
form them about what they have done...^v

إِلَيْنَا مَرْجِعُهُمْ فَنُنَبِّئُهُم بِمَا عَمِلُوا^{vi}

...To Us will be their return, and We will inform them
about what they have done...^{vi}

فَمَنْ يَعْمَلْ مِثْقَالَ ذَرَّةٍ خَيْرًا يَرَهُ وَمَنْ يَعْمَلْ
مِثْقَالَ ذَرَّةٍ شَرًّا يَرَهُ

ⁱ Qur’ān, 16:111

ⁱⁱ Qur’ān, 64:7

ⁱⁱⁱ Qur’ān, 6:132

^{iv} Qur’ān, 18:49

^v Qur’ān 24:64

^{vi} Qur’ān, 31:23

So, he who has done an atom's weight of good shall see it;
and he who has done an atom's weight of evil shall see it.ⁱ

This is only a small sample of the many verses in the Qur'ān that speak about man being raised with his actions and deeds and, on their account, becoming either felicitous or wretched.

Those souls who perform good deeds rise through the levels of being in the arc of ascent—acquiring at each step the special bounty and effusion appropriate to that level—until they return, once again, to the infinitude of Divine Mercy. They acquire in this way all of the Divine Names and Attributes, and thus, become one of His greatest signs. Imām 'Alī, Peace be upon him, would say, "There is not for God, a sign greater than myself."ⁱⁱ This group, then, has a good homecoming. The Qur'ān says,

الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ طُوبَىٰ لَهُمْ
وَحُسْنُ مَآبٍ

(As for) those who believe and do good, beatitude for them
and a goodly return.ⁱⁱⁱ

The disbelievers too—in the arc of descent—came with a divine creation (and nature) and use this, in the first stages of the arc of ascent, to know the good from the evil. But then, by their unbecoming actions, they deprive themselves of the meeting with God—the complete and total name of God—and instead are raised with His vengeance and His punishment. The Qur'ān states,

ⁱ Qur'ān, 99:7-8

ⁱⁱ Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 36, p. 1, chap. 25, and Kulaynī, *al-Kaṣfī*, vol. 1, p. 207, tradition 3.

ⁱⁱⁱ Qur'ān, 13:29

أَعَدَّ اللَّهُ لَهُمْ عَذَابًا شَدِيدًا إِنَّهُمْ سَاءَ مَا كَانُوا
يَعْمَلُونَ

God has prepared a severe punishment for them; Evil indeed is what they used to do.ⁱ

In this verse, the immediate mention of their bad actions after the severe punishment alludes to the fact that the punishment is actually nothing other than the reality of their actions and deeds. God addresses his Prophet in the Qur'ān in this way,

وَذَرُوا الَّذِينَ يُلْحِدُونَ فِي أَسْمَائِهِ سَيُجْزَوْنَ مَا
كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ

...and abandon those who commit sacrilege in His Names. Soon they shall be requited for what they used to do.ⁱⁱ

And in another verse,

فَلَا يُجْزَى الَّذِينَ عَمِلُوا السَّيِّئَاتِ إِلَّا مَا كَانُوا
يَعْمَلُونَ

...those who do evil shall not be recompensed but with what they did.ⁱⁱⁱ

VIII. Social Order

By considering the different types of human efforts and actions, a new dimension is introduced into the ascent of man. Man is a social creature and satisfies many of his natural needs and desires by recourse to society. His social life, in its turn, imposes certain codes of behaviour and action upon him.

ⁱ Qur'ān, 58:15

ⁱⁱ Qur'ān, 7:180

ⁱⁱⁱ Qur'ān, 28:84

Hence, certainly a large proportion—if not all—of his actions take on a communal character and are performed either with or alongside other people. Moreover, all human actions and behaviours, whether of social or individual nature, take shape in the context of human dynamics and are ultimately expressed as rules and laws, either civil or religious.¹

What has so far been said regarding the role of actions and deeds in man's ascension and the dynamics of his meeting with God applies to his whole being and includes all spheres of activity. Hence, it is not only his personal and individual actions that are effectual in delineating the dimensions of his beatific vision, but man's social behaviour also has a great role to play. Moreover, social norms and the rules and laws of society, insofar as they provide the framework for social behaviour, have instrumental value as well. The person who looks upon man and the world in a religious way knows for certain that his social behaviour—as well as the parameters relevant in defining it—is important and effectual in forming his personality and changing his inner reality.

The immediate presence of social behaviour and law in the very matrix of man's day-to-day endeavours and acts of will is tantamount to social action being a part and parcel of the path that the wayfarer is on and the path that he treads in his states of isthmus and resurrection. This is due to the fact that the ascension of the wayfarer commences with his actions and deeds. For the same reason, the religious man who believes in the day of resurrection and judgement (also called the day of reality) comes to know, on that day, the reality of his actions and the inner form of his deeds. He expects a response based on his behaviour and on how he conducted his social life.

Religion's discourse on social behaviour and methods is a consequence of its ontological and anthropological stances. This, in a way, means that the secular and materialistic outlook on social life and society—in its insistence on the separation of religion and politics—is an outlook that is only made pos-

¹ Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabā'ī, "Risālat al-Insān fī al-Dunyā," in *al-Rasā'il al-Tawḥīdīyah*, p. 190

sible when the interpretation of man and the world is an irreligious one.

The religious analysis of man's various spheres of behaviour and his social reality is based upon a special type of social study of the human state that can be termed "religious sociology." This sociology explains the social reality of man with reference to its inner divine nature and according to the type of manifestation that each of the names of God has in different societies. This differs from positivist sociology and phenomenalist sociology. The former takes into consideration only the physical dimension of social life as it is empirically discovered. The latter confines itself to the mental realm and, at best, considers social phenomena from a humanistic perspective. Both of these sociologies totally ignore the spiritual and heavenly dimensions of social existence.

In many of its verses, the Qur'an speaks of the resurrection of people and reveals the spiritual mechanisms and inner workings of their individual actions and the results thereof. But the Qur'an also speaks of the resurrection of peoples and nations and goes on to explain the secret and reality of some of the social laws and actions of man. In the chapter of *al-Jāthiyah*, for instance, after stating the fact that every soul shall earn the reward for what it has done, it goes on to describe the situation of every nation on the day of resurrection in this way:

وَتَرَىٰ كُلَّ أُمَّةٍ جَائِيَةً كُلُّ أُمَّةٍ تُدْعَىٰ إِلَىٰ كِتَابِهَا
 الْيَوْمَ تُجْزَوْنَ مَا كُنتُمْ تَعْمَلُونَ هَذَا كِتَابُنَا يَنْطِقُ
 عَلَيْكُمْ بِالْحَقِّ إِنَّا كُنَّا نَسْتَنسِخُ مَا كُنتُمْ تَعْمَلُونَ

And you will see every nation fallen on its knees. Every nation will be summoned to its book: "Today you will be requited for what you used to do. This is Our book, which

speaks truly against you. Indeed We used to record what you used to do.ⁱ

Allusions can be found in religious texts to prove that social behaviour and work can be a way to gain proximity to God in the same way that personal actions can become the means for spiritual elevation. For instance, Imām 'Alī, Peace be upon him, said, "Surely the poor-tax has been made, along with the prayers, as a means of nearness (to God)."ⁱⁱ

The Prophet, God's blessing be upon him and his progeny, is addressed in the Qur'ān regarding the charity or poor-tax (*al-zakāh*), which is a social and economic activity, in this way:

خُذْ مِنْ أَمْوَالِهِمْ صَدَقَةً تُطَهِّرُهُمْ وَتُزَكِّيهِمْ بِهَا
وَصَلِّ عَلَيْهِمْ إِنَّ صَلَاتَكَ سَكَنٌ لَهُمْ وَاللَّهُ سَمِيعٌ
عَلِيمٌ

Take charity from their possessions to cleanse them and purify them thereby, and bless them. Indeed your blessing is a comfort to them, and God is all-hearing, all-knowing..ⁱⁱⁱ

In Qur'ānic usage, the referents of the words "cleanse" (*tuṭahhir*) and "purify" (*tuzakkī*) allude to some of the most prominent factors in the ascent to God; and in this verse, God presents alms (*al-zakāh*) as the means of this cleansing and purification.

When some acts of personal worship take on a social form, their merit is multiplied many times over. The daily prayers, for example, (*al-ṣalah*), when performed in congregation, secure a much greater reward for the individual who joins in them. As the number of worshipers increase, the reward, as it were, increases exponentially. Even war (*jihād*), which is exclusively a communal and collective activity, has been described as a

ⁱ Qur'ān, 45:28-29

ⁱⁱ Kulaynī, *al-Kaṣfī*, vol. 5, p. 37, The Arabic reads, "Inna al-zakāt ju'ilat ma'a al-ṣalāt qurbānā".

ⁱⁱⁱ Qur'ān, 9:103

great act of worship. According to Imām 'Alī, Peace be upon him: "the holy war is a door from among the doors of Paradise that God opens for his special Friends."ⁱ

It is precisely because all social activities and laws have a direct impact on the afterlife of man that God has ordained special laws and canons for every nation and peoples with an aim to facilitate their attainment of divine mercy and pleasure. These laws have been arranged with a view to the otherworldly and inner effects of their corresponding actions and have been made manifest to humanity by way of the prophets. The Qur'ān affirms,

وَلَقَدْ بَعَثْنَا فِي كُلِّ أُمَّةٍ رَسُولًا أَنِ اعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ
وَأَجْتَنِبُوا الطَّاغُوتَ فَمِنْهُمْ مَّنْ هَدَى اللَّهُ وَمِنْهُمْ
مَّنْ حَقَّتْ عَلَيْهِ الضَّلَالَةُ فَسِيرُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ فَانظُرُوا
كَيْفَ كَانَ عَاقِبَةُ الْمُكَذِّبِينَ

Certainly We raised an apostle in every nation [to preach:] 'Worship God, and keep away from the Rebel.' Then among them were some whom God guided, and among them were some who deserved to be in error. So travel over the land and then observe how was the fate of the deniers."ⁱⁱ

Every one of the laws that God manifests, whether general or specific and irrespective of its natural and worldly effects, is based upon a reality that exists in its hidden essence and which will become apparent on the day of resurrection. In the same way that alms actually cleanse and purify the soul of man, usury (*ribā*) is said to be an objectively existing fire that enters the mouths of those who practice it. Similarly, bribery (*rishwah*) is said to be a putrid water that is drawn out of hell by the briber and the bribed, so real that its foul odour disturbs

ⁱ *Nahj al-balāghah*, sermon 27.

ⁱⁱ Qur'ān, 16:36

even the occupants of the infernal regions. The Qur'ān describes the hidden and inner reality of the action of those who usurp the property of orphans in the following terms:

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ يَأْكُلُونَ أَمْوَالَ الْيَتَامَىٰ ظُلْمًا إِنَّمَا
يَأْكُلُونَ فِي بُطُونِهِمْ نَارًا وَسَيَصْلَوْنَ سَعِيرًا

Indeed those who consume the property of orphans wrongfully, only ingest fire into their bellies, and soon they will enter the Blaze.ⁱ

In the chapter *al-Mā'idah*, the Qur'ān proclaims the Bible and the Torah to be heavenly books in which the Law of God was revealed and goes on to pronounce the disbelief, injustice and transgression of those who do not act according to this Law:

وَمَنْ لَّمْ يَحْكَمْ بِمَا أَنزَلَ اللَّهُ فَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ
الْكَاْفِرُونَ

...And whoever does not rule by what God has revealed, those are they that are the unbelievers.ⁱⁱ

وَمَنْ لَّمْ يَحْكَمْ بِمَا أَنزَلَ اللَّهُ فَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ
الظَّالِمُونَ

...And whoever does not rule by what God has revealed, those are they that are the unjust.ⁱⁱⁱ

وَلِيَحْكَمْ أَهْلُ الْإِنجِيلِ بِمَا أَنزَلَ اللَّهُ فِيهِ وَمَنْ لَّمْ
يَحْكَمْ بِمَا أَنزَلَ اللَّهُ فَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْفَاسِقُونَ

ⁱ Qur'ān, 4:10

ⁱⁱ Qur'ān, 5:44

ⁱⁱⁱ Qur'ān, 5:45

Let the people of the Evangel rule by what God has sent down in it. Those who do not rule by what God has sent down - it is they who are the transgressors. ⁱ

After the above verses and after explaining that the Prophet, God's blessing be upon him and his progeny, was sent with the Book, which is the truth and which verifies the former books—being an authority over them, God also orders the Prophet to judge and rule by what He has sent down and to refrain from following the lower desires of those around him. So, if people turn away from the rule of the Prophet, God's blessing be upon him and his progeny, then God will torment them with their sin.

أَفَحُكْمَ الْجَاهِلِيَّةِ يَبْغُونَ وَمَنْ أَحْسَنُ مِنَ اللَّهِ
حُكْمًا لِّقَوْمٍ يُوقِنُونَ

Is it then the rule of (the times of) ignorance that they desire? And who is better than God to rule for a people who have certainty? ⁱⁱ

In this verse, every rule, law or judgment that has not been revealed by God and is not in concordance with His orders—and hence, leads away from Him—has been called a law of ignorance.

ⁱ Qur'ān, 5:47

ⁱⁱ Qur'ān, 5:50

Chapter 5 – Love and Passion

I. Man's Beloved

Man's endless efforts in the life of this world are indicative of his wants and needs. What is man really after in his daily comings and goings? What is his ultimate desire? The answers to these questions decide, in a fundamental way, how a culture or civilization takes its shape and the direction that it follows. Even organizations, in their own way, base their short-term and long-term plans on their responses to such inquiries.

What method or methods must we use to arrive at answers to the above questions? Is it sufficient to directly question various individuals about their deepest desire and love and by generalizing the answers arrive at a conclusion? What if we were to take a survey of various societies, or to take a poll in any one particular community—would we arrive at one single answer to these questions?

First-hand questioning of people from different societies will yield answers that will be a reflection of the general culture. American youth, for instance, will usually see their desires and wants as revolving around "the American way of life". These answers, despite their common elements and the fact that they were collected from a single culture, will inevitably be rife with discrepancies and differences. In many cases these differences may go back to the particular things that individuals choose as examples of common ideals and desires. For example, many of the objects of love and desire in Western culture, are materialistic in nature. Things such as "the good life", a high standard of living, social status and position... are sought after by different people in different ways. The only constant at play here is the fact that a direct questioning and survey of individuals does not lead to a single answer, as each person is partial to his own taste and answers based on that taste. But due to the variance in the answers that people give,

can it be concluded that people do not have a common object of desire?

The answer to the above question can only be in the affirmative if the responses of the people were given with full knowledge and awareness. So, if different individuals choose different things—without making errors or mistakes in the process—then, and only then, can it be concluded that man does not have a single goal and a single beloved. But this cannot be, for we know by experience that we make mistakes—we choose something, thinking that we want it, only realizing afterwards that it was the wrong thing. Moreover, many people have readily admitted that they have spent the greater part of their lives chasing after what they thought was their true desire, but upon reaching it, have felt a profound sense of loss; or upon reaching their goal, have found that they no longer possess the enthusiasm and fervour that they had while seeking it.

It is because there is a possibility of making a mistake when deciding upon one's true need or desire that any conclusions regarding it cannot be categorical. The only thing that can be concluded is that this is what a given person has chosen for his goal and desire—without it necessarily coinciding with his true need or beloved.

Restlessness, anxiety, depression and the like, are signs pointing to the fact that all is not well, and that there is something definitely awry—something missing. The ambiguity is in ascertaining what this missing thing is, and how to regain that which has been lost. Some people, without deliberating much on the issue, accept the first thing that comes to their minds as their goal, or, alternatively, they come under the influence of their environment and acquiesce to its ideals and aspirations. They then pursue this goal, wholeheartedly as it were, and give of their most precious years until the end of their lives. Some awaken to the realization of their mistakes and regret the past, but others carry on until the very end without ever reaching the object of their desires or without ever having taken the time to seriously think about it.

However, some of those who do deliberate on man's ideals and goals have come to see most of what culture and the envi-

ronment impose in this regard, as being in error. Others from this same group, because they themselves have not come to know man's real purpose and goal, or having known it, think it to be unreachable or doubtful, come to the conclusion that man is destined to be a stranger and a drifter who will always be far from the shore of his goal.

Before analyzing the different answers that people have given to the question of what is man's most beloved thing, we must come to know some of the characteristics of his real and actual beloved, so as to be able to compare the two. Then and only then will we be able to judge fairly.

The true beloved is such that when man is removed and distanced from it, he searches for it. When he has found it, he is at peace, calm—a sense of gladness and happiness filling his being. The false beloved, on the other hand, is such that as long as he has not reached it, he sets of and enthusiastically pursues it—because he mistakenly thinks it to be the real one. Once he reaches it, however, peace and tranquillity evade him, and his anxiety and restlessness increase. The false beloved is a swindler and cheat who at first glance appears to be the embodiment of love and friendship. But once his reality is attained, he is seen to be an object of hate and revulsion. This is because love and hate are opposites, and wherever there is a false love, there is a true hate.

In addition to the true and false beloved, there exists a third category that is an object of man's desire: the virtual beloved (*maḥbūb majāzī*). The virtual beloved is not in opposition to the true or real beloved, nor is it an example of a real hatred. Nevertheless, its first principle is not love. The virtual beloved, just like the false one, shows to man what he wants to see. The difference between the two is that the virtual beloved is truthful in its display, while the false beloved is not.

The virtual beloved does not call man towards itself; rather it guides him towards the true beloved. The virtual beloved is like a highway, and not the highwayman. Man reaches the true beloved by way of the virtual one.

The three types of beloved call for three types of love. There is, then, a true love, a false love and a virtual love. True

love looks towards the real beloved, while false love is dazzled by the charms of the pretender. Virtual love concerns itself with the things that make man closer to his true and real beloved.

II. Modern Man

As never before in history, modern man has attached himself to the affairs of the material world—making it the sole object of his love, as it were. Secularism—meaning, to see things as purely material and “down to earth”—has influence over much of the ideological basis of human society. Furthermore, secularisation in the form of a mass movement, has affected the lives and behaviours of even a larger section of humanity. To start the discussion, it must first be seen whether or not worldly affairs, in spite of their variety, can be the real beloved of man. Second, the different viewpoints that modern man and modern philosophies hold on the subject at hand must be looked into.

Power, beauty, wealth, and social status—when looked upon in a purely materialistic fashion—become the goal and the beloved of many people. None of these, however, is a true beloved, and in reality, all of them are false. This is because the worldly life, for the person who has made it an end in itself, can never provide him with the peace of mind and contentment that he seeks. The true beloved, on the other hand, provides this and more.

The person totally engrossed in the pursuit of worldly things—or worldling for short—thinks the world to be his one true love. When he achieves his ambition and acquires the world, he sees that he is once again unhappy and dissatisfied. Not only do worldly things fail to bring about peace and serenity, but in fact, they actually increase the restlessness and anxiety of the man who seeks them. It is for this reason that the world has been compared to salt water. The thirsty man, thinking the salt water to be fresh water, erroneously makes it the object of his desire. Upon drinking it, however, he finds his thirst increases.³² The world is a commodity that brings

only greed and anxiety for its customer—greed directed towards that which the person does not have, and anxiety due to the fear of losing that which he possesses. The worldly competitor strives to throw his opponent to the ground so he himself can stand on the pedestal of glory. Before accomplishing this, he craves it and every moment that goes by only adds to his yearning. As he nears the goal, new goals and potential glories open up on the horizon before him—increasing his greed. To illustrate, when a man is after power in his own village, he loses sleep in plotting the downfall of his own neighbour. After achieving victory, he sees opportunities for greater glory in the province, and then in other lands. This continues, his greed knowing no bounds.

The limitations of material things being what they are, when a person takes possession of them, he prevents others from acquiring them. Now, because the others cannot have what he owns without taking it away from him, they become his competitors. Hence, the more a person owns, the greater the number of competitors he has; and because each and every one of them is a potential threat to his holdings, the more his anxiety increases.

Even when all frontiers have been crossed and all territories conquered, such that the "sun never sets" on one's personal empire, there remains one last insurmountable barrier and invincible opponent that sweeps away all of the gusto and euphoria of past victories and present powers. That eternal nemesis is nothing but time itself and the certain death that marks the end of it. Time and the moments that it contains are as a giant scroll which unfolds the personal destinies of all, and, before their lives are lived to the fullest, is gathered up again. How then, can one ignore the worldly man's longing to overcome even this unbeatable foe, and his anxiety at being finally caught in its throes?

The materialistic life not only fails to bring peace of mind, but it also adds significantly to its disturbance. It is because of this that all of the factors of anxiety and hatred in worldly people find their roots in expressions and feelings of love for

the world. Hence the tradition, "The love of the world is the root of every evil."ⁱ

Envy burns in the heart of the worldling—from afar as it were—because he yearns for the belongings of others, those which he himself does not have. The incessant warfare, skirmishes and disputes of men are nothing but this dog-like envy at play. In this analogy, worldly things are as a dead corpse, and the worldling is the dog who will fight to the finish to protect this prize, or will snatch it away from its previous holder at all costs. For the worldly man, the fundamental existential reality is dog-eat-dog.

The "philosophical" deliberations of contemporary western philosophers on man's preoccupation with the material world and his subjective afflictions, has led to some of them being labelled as "existential" philosophers. Each of these thinkers, commenting on the human predicament, has attempted to ascertain man's most basic desire and need. Some have reached the conclusion that the world is not man's true home because in this world there is nothing that gives him rest and peace of mind. For them, the world is a wasteland, in which man has been let loose much as a stray dog. In such a place, all the patterns of behaviour and standards of living that are imposed on man—in the form of social customs and the like—none of them being in line with his true reality, force him to undergo a metamorphosis.³³ In this estimation then, every disposition that man takes on is but a metamorphic façade; every situation that he finds himself in is alienating and estranging; and everything that influences his personality and psyche from the outside—artificially as it were—is nauseating to him and is rejected in a final act of rebellion.ⁱⁱ

Is man destined to always be an alien and outsider in this world? Is there not any hope, however slight, that he may eventually reach that long lost home—a place where he is no longer a stranger? Those who answer in the negative are

ⁱ Kulaynī, *al-Kaṣī*, vol. 2, p. 315, The Arabic reads, "*Ra'su kulli khaṭī'atin ḥubbu al-dunyā*."

ⁱⁱ The author is making allusions here to Albert Camus' novel, *L'Etranger* (*The Stranger/ The Outsider*) and Jean-Paul Sartre's book, *Nausea*.

doomed to a nihilism that leaves them perplexed and in disarray. They do have this advantage though, that they have seen through the guiles of this lower world and by fully sensing their alienation from it, have come to see it as their enemy and to despise it in a way. But not being able to see the light at the end of the tunnel, they look on the bleak side of everything. Remaining in the depths of despair and not having any hope for a future life, they reside in perpetual isolation and eternal purgatory. They discover hell on earth—here and now, and enter it, so to speak, before the divine command to do so.

There are those others, though, whose mastery exceeds that of even the greatest magicians. Warlocks of the nether world, they are skilled at conjuring up the mirages that worldlings incessantly chase, and in step with the latter's progress, move these false dreams further and further away. They try to keep alive the false hopes that the worldlings have of reaching the water in the mirage until the brink of death and their final departure from this world. These sorcerers are the apprentices of Satan, and even act as his ministers who initiate novices into the black arts. They conjure up a fool's paradise of a thousand colours and sounds and teach the worldlings to laugh and be merry on their way to it. They coax them to take up friends and companions for the journey—such "friends" as will end up being their worst enemies in hell.

According to some of these groups, man is nothing other than motion itself, which upon arriving at its destination, must stop and cease to be. Happiness and contentment is to be found only in man's hopes and desires. The beloved is always "over there" and the lover is perpetually on the way; love being a reality that is sacrificed and extinguished the moment that the lover reaches the beloved. A reality moreover, that at its climax—during the meeting of the two—appears as a hatred and enmity.

The most oblivious of all people, though, are those who run from questioning itself. There is no trace amongst them of anything that might even resemble a question or inquiry regarding the ultimate matters of human existence—the only matters that could provide peace and tranquillity for them.

For them, continuous change, which is the underlying reality of the material world, has become an idol that they worship under the guise and name of "modernity". This pseudo-principle of constant change is branded as the remedy for all ills and the answer for all questions, but it itself is never questioned and scrutinized by its own standards. The sway and dominion of this idol is such that its worshipers see it in its full force and form at all times and in all states—even when considering its very decline or absence. It is for this very reason that many of the discussions and arguments that have been lately put forward under the label of "post-modern thought", never really go beyond the above-mentioned "principles" and premises of modernity. On the contrary, they serve, more than ever before, to exemplify these very same "principles", for when the only constant is change, a perpetual change of basis is in line with principles.

Science and scientific inquiry, in the contemporary west, is not a knowledge that is accompanied by certainty—such as would allow man to arrive at the truth about reality—rather it is a form of knowledge that looks upon the material world only and serves to provide effective tools for the control and domination of nature and man's physical environment. This way of understanding and seeing the world has its roots in what came to be labelled as "positivism" in the 19th century. The following century was witness to its establishment and renewal, in various shapes and forms, by way of either a continuation of positivist currents of thought or its assorted offshoots. This line of thinking has also given rise to a series of more popular "escapist" philosophies in the west—philosophies which shun all the quintessential questions of the human condition and try their best to elude all considerations of purpose and meaning for the same. These considerations and their pursuit are the only things that can give some semblance of repose and tranquillity to the continuous expansion and unfolding of the human race.

To avoid the question is to refrain from thinking. To suspend thought is to surrender to the status quo. This giving in to the world, though, does not in the least reduce its burdens

and its trials. In fact, it only increases man's confinement; and being caught up in it, man becomes more anxious and agitated.

III. Philosophical Man

Positivist viewpoints and their counterpoises—in the form of various existentialist movements—are the two main trends in philosophy that have set the tenor of philosophical thought in the western world of the 20th century. They are united in their denial of the intellectual knowledge and comprehensibility of being, and all that is essentially metaphysical in nature. The difference between these two currents lies in their treatment of the realities facing man in the contemporary world. Positivism—the one which has a total hold on modern science and technology—in not wanting to face reality, refuses to reflect on the current human situation. The other school, on the contrary, gives graphic accounts of the plight of modern man and thereby moves him further into the quagmire in which he has landed himself. Nihilistic apathy, profound meaninglessness, anxiety, depression and the inability to appreciate any sense of the sacred or transcendental—these are only some of the things that this latter group has found when observing their inner realities.

Philosophers and sages who foster intellectual knowledge³⁴ are divided into two groups. Some limit intellectual knowledge to the mental apprehension of concepts, the process of deduction, and the proofs and arguments of logic. Others include intellectual intuition (or witnessing—*shuhūd 'aqlī*), and even consider it to be the basis and underlying principle of all intellectual knowledge. Both of these groups, acknowledging the subordinate and imperfect nature of the material world, readily admit the falsity and futility of man's wants and desires in it. In consequence, they do not see this world to be man's true home, but on the other hand, they also do not fall prey to the nihilism and scepticism that have become the hallmarks of the two currents of thought in the contemporary west.

Positivists end up in a disabling scepticism and a confused Pyrrhonism, while existentialist groups, at best, only bemoan the pathetic plight of man in this world. But this is certainly not the only outcome of human thinking. Intellectual thinkers do not just speak of the undesirability of the human condition and do not consider it to be man's inevitable fate. On the contrary, true intellectuals are of the opinion that there is felicity for man, and that it is of a non-material, intellectual nature.

The intellectual order or intelligible world is free of the imperfections and deficiencies found in nature, for it is not limited by time and space and is not given to the oppositions and contentions inherent in the material world. When beauty, power, life, knowledge, etc. appear in an intellectual modality, they are seen to gain permanence and perpetuity—becoming free of the variable and ephemeral nature of the material order. Now, when man, who from the philosophical perspective is essentially and substantially an intellectual being, acquires the above mentioned attributes and perfections, he feels a sense of euphoria and happiness that can never be the lot of those attached only to this material world. From this standpoint, intellectual detachment and transcendence is the true perfection of the human soul, and is, therefore, also its true ideal and beloved. Hence, true love is a love that is centred on man's reality—his intellect.

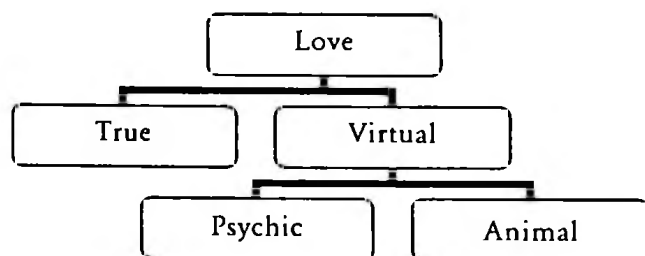
In the philosophical appraisal of things, virtual love (*'ishq majāzī*) is a love that pertains to the facets of the beloved's soul. These facets or characteristics are intellectual attributes, and to love them encourages man to love the reality and intellectual essence that lies behind them. This in turn, prepares the ground for the true perfection of the soul. According to this perspective, the love of natural existents and material objects is a false love. This is because these existents, being contingent, are prone to change, decline and annihilation. The attachment of the soul to these things, only serves to make man feel restless, anxious and full of a sense of loss.

Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna)³⁹ in his work, *Al-Ishārāt wa al-Tanbīhāt*, writes, "Continent love (*al-'ishq al-'afīf*), which is governed by the character traits of the beloved, is not ruled by lust and car-

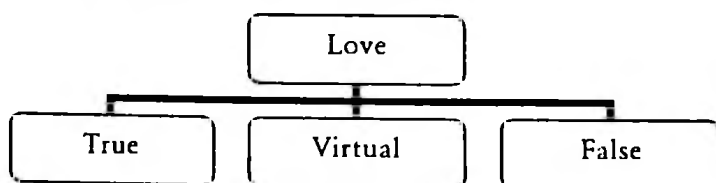
nal desire.”ⁱ This “continent love” that he speaks of is in reality the same thing as the virtual love that was mentioned above. He held that this type of love—in which the attributes of the beloved are considered without lust getting the better of the lover—is the means by which the self is purified and the soul rarefied so that man can arrive at his true beloved and perfection.

Khājah Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī in his commentary on the *Ishārāt* explains Ibn Sīnā’s words in the following manner: “Human love is divided into two parts—true and virtual. True love is based on real existential perfections; its intellectual immateriality and intelligible nature having been previously discussed. Virtual love is divided into psychic (*naḥsānī*) and animal (*haywānī*).”

“Virtual love” in the usage of Khājah Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī is more general than how the term was previously used here, and includes both virtual love and false love. In his division of the more general “virtual love” into psychic and animal, the former is virtual love and the latter is false love. The threefold division of love according to Ṭūsī can be illustrated in the following way:

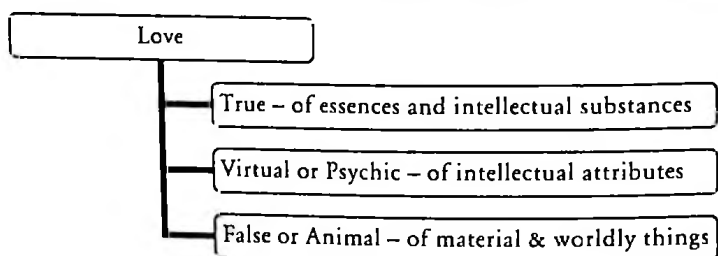


The threefold categorization preceding this one can be demonstrated by the following diagram:



ⁱ Ibn Sina, *Al-Ishārāt wa al-Tanbīhāt*, nimaṭ 9, chapter 7 and 8

By comparing the two diagrams it can readily be seen that the psychic-virtual love of the first diagram is the same as the virtual love of the second one and that the animal-virtual love of the first is equivalent to the false love of the second. Khājah Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī³⁶ says of psychic love—which was seen to be the same as virtual love—“The root of psychic love is the substantial form of the soul of the lover and the beloved, the major part of the attraction being centred upon the character traits and moral attributes of the beloved.” The root of animal love (which was equivalent to false love) is carnal desire. Such love seeks animal and carnal pleasure and is attuned to the outer form, colour and shape of the beloved. Hence, what Ibn Sīnā spoke of as “continent love” is the same as psychic love. This is because animal love—which is a false love—causes the carnal soul to become dominant. The false love helps the carnal soul to overcome and take command of the intellect and to bring it into its own service. In most cases animal love is accompanied by sin and the passage of time only increases the appetite for further sins. Psychic love, on the other hand, unlike false love is not animalistic. This type of love calms the soul and makes it fervent. It softens the heart, inhibits the soul from worldly involvements and keeps it away from all that is not the beloved—thereby concentrating all of its efforts on one thing and making it centred. All this facilitates the soul’s advance toward its true beloved. By his indifference to worldly multiplicities, the person who loves moral and psychic perfections finds that he has a greater capacity for approaching the real beloved. This is because in this case he does not have to break himself away from too many things before turning towards the real beloved. The following diagram illustrates true, virtual and false love from the philosophical perspective:



IV. Critique of the Philosophical Perspective

The intellectual and rational exposition of the true, virtual and false beloved, according to the principles that were enunciated with regards to man's journey of descent and ascent in the preceding chapters, is acceptable but mediocre and incomplete. According to those principles every existent has descended from the world of intellects to the isthmus and from there to the natural realm, and it will once again ascend—after having acquired new attributes—from the natural world to the isthmus and from there to the world of intellects. Hence, the natural world is not the final home and goal of man and is but a passageway, and man can never be satisfied by all that exists in nature and the worldly realm.

In the history of philosophical thought, philosophical anthropology and ontology have described man's comings and goings and his journey and existential breadth in the ways already mentioned. For example, Plato held natural things to be the descended forms and shadows of intellectual realities. He saw the world to be man's prison and saw felicity to lie in man's return to the intelligible world. He believed that by arriving at the world of intellects, man would be freed of the imperfections and deficiencies inherent in the life of this world and would thus become near to the Good.

The reason that the intellectual analysis of man is imperfect lies in the fact that despite all the assets of intellectual realities in comparison with natural things, they do not constitute man's true beloved and proper dwelling. It is true that man in the arc of descent to this world has come from the world of intellects and that in the arc of ascent he crosses the stages of being of the isthmus and the intellects, but these worlds are not the be all and end all of his journey. The beginning and end of man lies beyond the natural, imaginal and intelligible worlds.

Man has come from God and returns to Him.¹ From the religious perspective, man is originated by God and is the originative and creative act of God. God is the originator and crea-

¹ *innā lillāhi wa innā ilayhi rāji'ūn*, Qur'ān, 2:156

tor of the heavens and the earth and it is for this reason that man and the world have no other reality other than being signs and pointers. This reality permeates their being in all its states and dimensions so that no matter from which angle and perspective they are observed, nothing but a face of God is visible. Hence, whenever an existent is observed without taking into consideration its significative aspect in reference to the origin—regardless of whether it is of a natural, imaginal or intellectual nature—such an observation is the result of the fall of man from the realm of reality and is mixed with error. Any knowledge based upon it is a false and destructive knowledge.

The infinite boundlessness of God does not leave any room on the sides—so to speak—where any existent could possibly find the “place” to independently manifest itself. “Wheresoever you turn, there is the face of God”.ⁱ For this reason, the person who is deprived of Its vision is in fact blind and cannot see the reality of the world and himself. He who sees the beatific vision of the face of God, can never look upon any other existent in an independent way—irrespective of whether that existent is of the higher states of being or the lower. Imām Husayn (upon him be Peace) in the noble prayer of *‘Arafah* says: “Blind is the eye that does not see [that] You are watchful over it, and at a loss is the hand of the servant for which Your love has not been apportioned (and destined).”

In this short fragment of the prayer of *‘Arafah*, three noteworthy points can be seen. The first pertains to the beginning part in which the person who does not see the Truth is called blind. The second is to be had from the last part of the fragment where the person whose life does not end in the love of God is termed a loser. The third is the overall message that is obtained by combining the two parts.

The first part speaks of the beatific vision, while the second talks of divine love and passion—this is so because without the vision, love does not emerge. When the infinite divine beauty and majesty is made manifest, love of God—which is a divine form of love—instantly appears on the scene.

ⁱ Qur’ān, 2:115

Now the Divine Essence is sublime and cannot truly be known by other than Itself. No one knows Him to the extent that He is worthy to be known. The Prophet (God's blessing be upon him and his progeny), who is the most aware of all creatures in regards to God said: "We have not known You to what is the right of Your knowledge."ⁱ So while it is true that the very essence of God is not knowable, His face and signs are ubiquitous. Moreover, on the Resurrection day—the day when the Truth will manifest Itself—the actual non-existence of those things that had been unrightfully thought to [independently] exist will become apparent and the subsisting perpetuity of the boundless face of God will reveal itself.

كُلُّ مَنْ عَلَيْهَا فَإِنْ وَبَّقَىٰ وَجْهَ رَبِّكَ ذُو الْجَلَلِ
وَالْإِكْرَامِ

Everyone on it is ephemeral, yet lasting is the Face of your Lord, majestic and munificent.ⁱⁱ

According to the ontology of religion God is unlimited being and infinite perfection. Alongside this infinite being—whether vertically or horizontally—no other real being can even be posited in an intelligible manner. Creation in all of its states and levels—natural, imaginal and intellectual—is nothing other than a sign and indication of God. It is for this very reason that none of these levels can be the true beloved. The Persian poet Sa'dī³⁷ censures the philosophical approach towards understanding existence by writing:

The way of the intellect is all twists and turns,
But the concern of the gnostics is for God alone!
This can be said to those who recognize realities,
Though adherents of analogy may carp thereat and say:
'What, then, is heaven, and what earth besides?

ⁱ Majlisī, *Bihār al-Anwār*, vol. 66, p. 292, and Majlisī, *Mirāt al-'Uqūl*, vol. 8, p. 164

ⁱⁱ Qur'ān, 55:26-27

Who are the sons of Adam, and the beasts both
wild and tame?ⁱ
A proper thing you've asked, O prudent one!
I'll tell you - if you find the answer proper:
The plain and the ocean, the mountain and the sky,
Pari and manchild, demon and angel -
All, whatsoever they be, are less than That
By virtue of Whose being they utter being's name!
Monstrous before you, with waves, lies the ocean;
High is the sun, all ablaze at the zenith:
Yet how shall the men of Outward Form discover
That the lords of Idea reside in a realm
Where even the sun counts not for an atom,
And all seven oceans are not as one drop!
When the Sovereign of Grandeur raises His stand-
dard,
The world sinks its head in non-being's collar.ⁱ

V. True Beloved

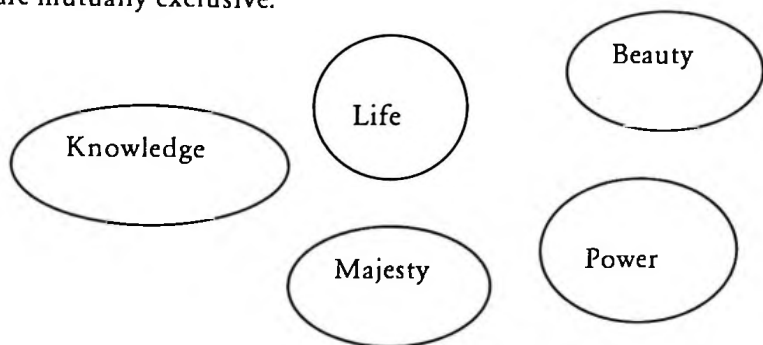
From the preceding discussions it has become clear that true love is certainly not the love and lust for meagre worldly possessions. Neither is it a love for Paradise and the imaginal or spiritual heavens. Even though the perfections of the imaginal and spiritual or intellectual orders are superior to and worthier than those of the worldly plane, they none the less do not have independent existence and reality. Real perfection and beauty belongs solely to absolute and infinite Being and true love is that which comes about through a vision of It. Now, by virtue of the fact that man in essence is a relation of this absolute Being and is nothing but a sign and indicator of It, his human nature yearns for and desires that Being.

While human nature seeks all possible perfections, it is never at ease and satisfied by any one particular and limited perfection. If it searches for power, then it wants absolute

ⁱ Shaykh Muṣliḥuddīn Sa'dī, *The Būstān*, Chapter 3, lines 1900 to 1902, translated by G.M. Wickens.

power. If it wants knowledge and beauty, then it wants them in an unlimited fashion. Of course if power, beauty and knowledge—or other perfections—are unlimited and infinite then in reality they cannot be separate and different from one another. If they were separate then they would be limited to the extent of their own space and would not be present in the place that the others are.

The diagram below shows some perfections that are apart from one another. These perfections, even if they are assumed to be unlimited, are in fact limited by the fact that their loci are mutually exclusive.



Every one of the above perfections can truly be non-delimited only when it is co-present with the other perfections. In this case, all of these perfections are gathered together in one single essence that is simple (*basit*). What is meant by "simple" here is that this essence does not contain parts so that, for example, one part would be knowledge, another power, a third life, and so on. If this were to be the case then all the perfections and attributes possessed by the essence would be limited.

To be all-knowledge, all-power, and all-beauty means that His essence is not composite—containing parts that would correspond to knowledge, while others to power and others still to other attributes. And when it is said that He has all knowledge or all power, what is meant is that there is no power, knowledge, beauty ... that is not related to Him.

Absolute and infinite power is not an attribute that designates the enormity of its holder in comparison to other pow-

ers. It also does not signify that the other powers—whether physical or intellectual—are so small and petty in the face of the absolute power so as not to be even counted. For if this were the case then His power would be set up against and alongside the other powers such that those other powers—no matter how small and insignificant—would be outside His realm of power. Hence His power would be limited. In the same way, unlimited beauty is not a beauty to out shine other beauties or effectively render them ugly. For if this were so then its beauty would not be viable where the other beauties subsist, hence delimiting it. Its limitless power and beauty, then, is such a power and beauty that wherever power and beauty are to be found they are related to It. This type of beauty and power, which permeates all affairs, leaves no voids. It is that very same reality, the One, from which all natural, imaginal and intellectual powers—along with other perfections of other realms—have emanated by way of *tajallī* and not *tajāfī*. This is because in a descent and emanation (*sudūr*) by *tajallī*, the descended object never limits the origin of descent and emanation and remains but a sign and indicator of the origin of descent. It can thus be concluded that limitless power and beauty are realities of which all limited powers and beauties are simply the signs, indicators, evidences and traces of.

In the opening lines of the prayer of *Kumayl*, the prince of eloquence, Imām ‘Alī (upon him be Peace) who himself is of God’s origination and nature, explains some of the things that human nature truly desires in these words,

Oh God, I ask Thee by Thy mercy,
which embraces all things;

By Thy strength,
through which Thou domineest all things,
toward which all things are humble
and before which all things are lowly;

by Thy invincibility,

LOVE AND PASSION

through which Thou overwelmeſt all things;
by Thy might, which nothing can reſiſt;

by Thy tremendousneſs, which has filled all things;

by Thy force, which towers over all things;
by Thy face,
 which ſubſiſts after the annihilation of all
 things;

by Thy Names,
 which have filled the foundations of all
 things;
and by the light of Thy face,
 through which all things are illumined!

Oh Light! Oh All-holy!
Oh Firſt of thoſe who are firſt and Laſt of thoſe
 who are laſt!

God's infinite mercy, invincibility, and might, and His Names which have filled the outer and inner of all things, and His face, the light of which benefits all things, are the beloved and deſired of all men. Moreover, all human beings, whether they admit to this reality and take ſteps towards its realization or whether they apparently deny it and move towards error, are in all caſes thirſty for this rapture and meeting. For certain, there is a group from amongſt thoſe who reach the goals, whoſe thirſt is quenched by ſparkling ſprings, and who are nourished by boundleſs feaſts.³⁸

Juſt as God is true Perfection, love for the Divine Eſſence is true love, or in the terminology of the miſtics, the "original love". This love is the ſame as the love that He, in His eſſence, has for Himſelf. This is ſo becauſe no one knows the Divine Eſſence as He does, nor ſees the divine beauty as He does. He

³⁸ Taken from *Supplications (Du'ā) Amīr al-mu'minīn*, 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib (upon him be Peace), translated by William C. Chittick.

is Himself enraptured in infinite bliss at the sight of such infinite perfection and beauty.

If true love is the love for the Divine Essence, then virtual love is the love for His signs and for those things which manifest Him. That is to say, virtual love is the love for the Divine Names and Attributes. This is because the latter are the same as His signs. False love is a love of anything that does not show and manifest the divine, and instead is seen in an independent fashion. It matters not whether this object of false love is of the natural, imaginal or intellectual orders.

VI. The Inner Chamber

When existents themselves become the sought after object and are thought of as being the goal, they do nothing to give man peace of mind. In this there is no difference between natural and intelligible existents. Hence, even intellectual realities, if seen as the true beloved, become the objects of false love. Every existent that sees effects as issuing from itself cannot reach true or even virtual love. This is so even for the angels if they are fixated on themselves or their intellectual and spiritual perfections.

When divine beauty manifests itself by way of *tajallī*, love emerges. This love and consuming passion is so intense that it leaves no room for the selfhood and self-centredness of man and the world. The Persian poet Ḥāfiz³⁹ describes this love in the following way,

Your radiant Beauty came manifest in eternity;
Love appeared, engulfing the whole world in its
blazing fire.
Your Face radiated once, but saw no love in angels;
Thus set aflame, It burned in jealousy and turned to
Man.
Reason desired in stealth light from that passion-
al fire;
Then jealousy welled and nigh was the world rent
asunder.

The courter desired a glimpse of the inner chamber;
Thundered the voice from beyond, Whither goes ye
intruder?!

The manifestation of divine beauty is by way of *tajalli*, and, not being limited to time and space, is an eternal reality. Angels, who are creatures of the intelligible world, do not apprehend this absolute beauty; nor does the intellect, which is engaged in cognising the angelic world at best, perceive it fully. But the intellect, with all its limitations and weaknesses, is a "veil of light", in that it is not devoid of the divine message and call. The intellect, alongside the prophets and the saints, is an inner voice and proof.

The intellect is aware of the mysteries that lie beyond itself and acknowledges its limitations in being able to access them. In fact it is this very awareness that ignites the passion and whets the appetite of man so that he yearns to reach their reality. The intellect also understands that it cannot arrive except by going beyond the limitations of rationality and by fulfilling the prerequisites of intuition, which involves purification, change, transformation, and transcendence. On this account, the journey of the intellect towards that goal is like a passage through fire, the flames of which burn its being. The reality of all that is in its view is transformed into a new reality, which is nothing other than the unveiling of its aspect as a sign and indicator of God.

The claimant and courter in the above poem represents the mind of the ratiocinator which is complacent in its own sphere and has not washed its hands of itself and all that it claims to possess. Instead of referring "its" perfections—and all other perfections for that matter—to their true Owner, it claims them for itself. Hence it is truly an outsider and intruder not worthy of the inner truth. The unseen hand that stops him is a veil, corresponding to God's manifest face and the human soul, which covers the eyes and heart of the intruder and denies him access to the divine mysteries.

A certain man came and knocked at a friend's door: his friend asked him, "Who art thou, O trusty one?" He answered, "I." The friend said, "Begone, 'tis not the time (for thee to come in): at a table like this there is no place for the raw."

Save the fire of absence and separation, who (what) will cook the raw one? Who (what) will deliver him from hypocrisy?

The wretched man went away, and for a year in travel (and) in separation from his friend he was burned with sparks of fire.

That burned one was cooked: then he returned and again paced to and fro beside the house of his comrade.

He knocked at the door with a hundred fears and respects, lest any disrespectful word might escape from his lips.

His friend called to him, "'Who is at the door?' He answered, "'Tis thou art at the door, O charmer of hearts."

"Now," said the friend, "since thou art I, come in, O myself: there is not room in the house for two I's."ⁱ

According to the revered poet Sa'dī, if a person wants to experience true love and attain the beatific vision, then he must go beyond his own self.

If a man of Love you'd be, make yourself of slight account:

If otherwise, then take the road of safety!

Fear not that the Lover will turn you to dust,

For if He destroys you, you'll be everlasting:

No plant grows rightly from the seed

Unless its state first altered be.

Alone that grants you acquaintance with Truth

Which first grants you release from self's own hand;

ⁱ Jalāluddīn Rūmī, *The Mathnawī*, Book I, lines 3056 to 3063, translated by Reynold A. Nicholson, first published in 1926.

For while you're with yourself, to the Self you'll
have no road
(And only one beside himself of this fine point's
aware!).ⁱ

The person who has not washed his hands of his own self is a claimant, and a claimant is deprived of the beatific vision of the Beautiful God which is manifest everywhere. Hence he can never have true love and instead becomes mired in false love.

True and virtual love gain ascendancy only after the demise of the love of self and mind. Although according to religious texts the worldly people will be resurrected with the inner reality of this lower world—which is nothing other than hell, and the seekers of heaven will be resurrected with their goal—which is paradise, and despite the fact that these two groups are quite distinct from one another, their zeal and desire is not really that commendable. That which is truly worthy and laudable in man is to worship God Himself, without making Him the means to another end. It is to give Him, and Him alone, all their attention and to make Him partner to their innermost secrets and desires. As Sa'dī says,

If yours be proximity in the hall of audience,
Ignore not the emperor for robes of honour's sake!
Such procedure violates the Way, for saints
Do naught desire of God but God;
If to your friend's beneficence you have an eye, and
not to him,
To self you are in bondage, not bound by the
friend.
So long as you mouth stands open for greed,
No secret will reach your heart's ear from the World
Unknown:
Truth is a mansion, all decked-out,
Fancy and appetite are but the dust arising:
See you not that where dust rises

ⁱ Shaykh Muṣliḥ al-Huḍaynī Sa'dī, *The Būstān*, Chapter 3, lines 1957 to 1961, translated by G.M. Wickens.

The sight sees not although a man be sighted?ⁱ

Those who spend their lives in the pursuit of paradise or run from the fear of the fire are like slaves or traders. While those who spend their days and nights in anticipation of the beatific vision are truly free men and live a free life.

VII. Virtual Love

From the perspective of philosophy, the love of intelligible attributes and characteristics is a virtual love, while the love for the immaterial essence of the soul or intellect is a true love. In a similar way the love of worldly things is a false and lying love. This is an intermediate and mediocre perspective and is approved of by religion with the condition that it does not go on to deny higher levels of love. In the exact religious analysis, which is the forte of the mystics, virtual love has a much wider meaning and scope. This is because from this latter point of view, worldly things—which were seen by philosophy to be false, as well as intellectual and immaterial essences—which philosophy called true beloveds, are considered as objects of virtual love with the condition that they are seen from their divine aspects and as God's names and attributes. In this way the world and the natural order do not come to be denounced and hated in an all out fashion. What is loathed though is to make the "self" the be all and end all, and to consider it in an independent way. In other words, when love is directed at the natural world in itself, it is the greatest human error. Hence the tradition, "The love of the world is the root of every evil."ⁱⁱ But if the world is seen as the manifestation and sign of God then in all its states it is divine speech and becomes the object of virtual love. As the poet says, "My pleasure with the world is, 'cause the world is His Pleasance'.ⁱⁱⁱ

ⁱ *ibid*, lines 1880 to 1885

ⁱⁱ Kulaynī, *al-Kaṣf*, vol. 2, p. 315, The Arabic reads, "*Ra'su kulli khaṭī'atin hubbu al-dunyā*."

ⁱⁱⁱ "*bih jahān khurram az ānam, kih jahān khurram az Ūst*".

Regardless of how others might interpret the world, the truly free men see it as a mirror for divine secrets and from its aspect of being a sign and indicator of God, regard it as a virtual beloved.

Full of ecstatic melody's the world, intoxication,
frenzy too -
Yet what sees the blind man in the mirror?
Do you not see how a camel, when coaxed by the
Arabs,
Is brought to dance by the sound of minstrelsy?
And if a camel's head knows frenzy, minstrelsy,
The man whose head does not's an ass!ⁱ

False interpretations do not correspond to the external reality of the world. They arise from the mind and conjecture of satanic men and jinn. These devils sit in ambush along the path to God and engage in what might be described as "highway robbery". Of course, their stratagems and tricks have no effect on those who are well versed in the secrets and mysteries of the world. This is because the initiated see God's hand and plan in the very acts of the evildoers and are, on that account, inwardly full of bliss and ecstasy. Evil men and jinn display a false reality through their invalid actions and corrupt thoughts regarding themselves and the world. In the same way that this false reality becomes the object of divine displeasure and wrath, it also comes to be hated by free men and wayfarers along the Path.

Those men who, with their baseless ideas, act as highway robbers on the road to God are the satanic rebels referred to in Islamic parlance as *ṭāghūt*. Those others who, in answering the beckon of the first, align their ideas and actions in accordance with the beckoning, are nothing but the slaves and stooges of *ṭāghūt*. Any and all love that these slaves give to their masters, just like the love of the lower world, is a false love.

ⁱ Shaykh Muṣliḥhuddīn Sa'dī, *The Būstān*, Chapter 3, lines 1975 to 1977, translated by G.M. Wickens.

On the other side, there are those men who have become purged of their false "selves" and by way of acts of proximity—both obligatory and preferred—they have become deserving of divine purification. Such was the case of the Family of the Prophet (God's blessing be upon him and his progeny) who were thus purified. The Qur'ān says,

إِنَّمَا يُرِيدُ اللَّهُ لِيُذْهِبَ عَنْكُمُ الرِّجْسَ أَهْلَ الْبَيْتِ
وَيُطَهِّرَكُمْ تَطْهِيرًا

Indeed God desires to repel all impurity from you, O People of the Household, and purify you with a thorough purification...¹

Those who receive Divine Revelation and inspiration do not speak of their own accord, as they are the treasure houses of divine knowledge and the standards of justice. Their words, just like their deeds, call people towards God. This is why loving them is not like the love for the devils amongst men and jinn. The latter is a false love whereas love for them is a virtual love. This is because they, who are perfect men, never call people towards themselves but rather invite them—by way of a divine speech and calling that is errorless—towards God. In the *Ziyārat al-Jāmi'at al-Kabīrah*, they are eulogised in the following way:

Peace be upon the Callers to God
the Evidences of God's Pleasure,
those Imbued in God's Command,
those Perfect in the Love of God,
the Purified in the Unity of God,
the Manifesters of God's Prescriptions and Proscriptions,
His noble servants who do not overtake Him in speech,
and who act upon His command;

¹ Qur'ān, 33:33

May God's Mercy and Grace be upon them.

Those who are themselves immersed in God's command, and in fact constitute that single command, and who make apparent His law in the natural world and also act according to it—they are the ones about whom it is said:

Your speech is light,
 Your command is guidance,
 Your advices, piety,
 Your deeds, goodness,
 Your habits, beneficence,
 Your character, noble,
 Your station is truth, integrity, intimacy;
 Your word is law - binding,
 Your opinion is knowledge, forbearance, resolute-
 ness;
 When the Good is mentioned, you are its start,
 root, branches, mine, origin and end

All existents are the signs and indicators of God, but each one shows one of His names. For instance, one existent might manifest the special guidance of God for the believers while another might exhibit His misguidance in relation to the disbelievers and the hypocrites. The indication and manifestation that the perfect man has in respect to God is greater than that of the other existents. Beyond this, because he is the holder of the station of nearness⁴⁰ and is the manifestation of God's Greatest Name and is the pontifex between the Creator and creation, the vision of God's majesty and beauty is not possible except through his manifestation. To repeat, it is only by his mediation and guidance that the beatific vision is made possible. It is because of this that loving God is facilitated by virtue of the love for the perfect man; and this latter love is the same as virtual love.

The perfect man in annihilated in the love of God and, by his act of guidance, opens the way for the friends of God. These friends, by following his word, are led to that which he

shows them. Thus for those seekers who make the intention to achieve the beatific vision and who wish that God would love them, there remains no alternative but to take hold of the prophets and the saints.

Sa'di, if you are young and wish to be in love,
Then the love of Muḥammad and the Family of
Muḥammad is enough for you.

True and original love is the love of the Divine Essence. Virtual love is the love of God's names and attributes. The world, from the perspective that it is a sign of God is a virtual beloved. The highest and greatest of the signs are the prophets and the saints—in particular the last of the prophets, the prophet Muḥammad (God's blessing be upon him and his progeny), as he is the manifestation of the Greatest Name of God. To love the Prophet then—and his Progeny as they are of him and his "self" according to the Qur'ān—is the best virtual love.

VIII. Mirage of Love

For those whose ontological perspective is limited to the worldly sphere, the objects of love they seek are material and natural. When they reach these objects, it is not love they find but rather lust, and the person who lusts after things is not a lover but rather a debauchee.

As Persian literature and poetry has developed in the light of the intellect and has borrowed from Revelation, it is full of expressions which warn about making the truth of love and true love correspond to things in the material and natural world. Niẓāmī Ganjawī,⁴¹ whose works such as *Laylā wa Majnūn* are now famous the world over, describes true love and distinguishes it from lust in the following manner:

Love is the sublime reflector of Light,
Far is lust to be counted as true love.

Sa'dī of Shīrāz in holding that lust is not even a form of virtual love says:

O Sa'dī, don't mix together lust with love,
For demons go not where angels glorify.

In reality it is virtual love that mixes with true love so as to take the lover towards the true beloved. For lust takes its victim farther from true love and causes him to be cast down from the angelic realm. In many instances Mawlānā Rūmī, who is one of the greatest lovers, holds love to be the cure to all of man's ills. He reveals the true nature of false love and in some verses he is quite explicit...

The loves which are for the sake of a colour (outward beauty),
Are not love: in the end they are a disgrace.ⁱ

According to the mystics, it is not just worldly affairs and the material aspects of things which are false beloveds, but intelligible essences and their perfections and attributes—when regarded as independent—are also false beloveds. For them, the true beloved is only God, and the world—insofar as it indicates and guides towards Him—can be called a virtual beloved.

God is the sum total of true and real love. Hence virtual love is in reality nothing other than a beam and ray of His true love. More importantly, even false love takes advantage of the divine reserves of love, even though it ends up wasting them and is ultimately at a loss.

The infatuation that people have for the forms and images of material things is comparable to their enchantment with mirages. For the person who chases a mirage is in actuality thirsty. He sees signs of water in the mirage. His eventual death is due to the fact that the mirage is false in its display

ⁱ Jalāluddīn Rūmī, *The Mathnawī*, Book I, line 205, translated by Reynold A. Nicholson, first published in 1926.

and presentation. The further he goes towards the mirage, the further he is from water. His only accomplishment is having become utterly weak and debilitated.

The efforts and actions that people make towards the world and false beloveds reduces their enthusiasm for intellectual realities and dampens their fervour for God Himself.

Man's essence is the origination and creation of God and the bond and connection that man has with God is at the very crux of his being. In the first stages of the ascent man is face to face with natural and material objects and just like the thirsty person who sees signs of water in the mirage, he sees signs of beauty in the natural and material scenery surrounding him. He does not see that these natural realities, because of their limitation, ephemerality and decay are but shaky and agitated pictures⁴² of intellectual realities and are nothing but faint and fleeting shadows of the heavenly beauties and graces. As such they are false representations of the eternal and infinite beauty of God.

The thirsty man, encouraged on by his innate nature, moves forward in the world which gives the appearance of containing sweet water. But every step that he takes and at each point that he arrives at, he feels that his thirst has not been quenched and that his life is not vibrant and fulfilling. He seeks all worldly things because he sees signs of limited perfection in them. But because of the essential limitation of these things, he does not find what he is truly looking for. Hence he is always looking beyond and for more, not being satisfied with what he has. The grass looks greener on the other side, and thus he is initiated into a cycle of greed, envy and anxiety. Therefore it is a fact that man is perpetually being fed from the treasures of his nature, but in many cases, due to his unwise and mistaken steps, man is not true to it. For instead of using the resources of his nature to move towards that which fulfils his true needs, he misuses them and, in an act of treachery, starts off in other directions.

From the past discussions, three interpretations of false love can be derived. The first is the worldly or secular outlook. In this outlook true love is love of worldly and material things

and false love is love of otherworldly and non-material realities. According to this perspective, love for transcendental realities arises as a result of attempts to reconcile material and worldly deprivation with the demands of natural instincts. The reconciliation is aided by man's imagination and conjecture.

The second view is that of philosophy. In this interpretation true and virtual love is love of intellectual realities and their intelligible attributes and perfections, while false love, as has been previously explained, pertains to matters of the natural world.

The third interpretation lies above and in a vertical continuum. It is deeper than the second one. Its outlook names the love of the Divine Essence as true love and a love of the Divine Names and Attributes as a virtual love. On this account, false love is the love of anything other than the Divine Essence and Names—whether this other be of the material, imaginal, or intellectual order. This third interpretation is firmly rooted in Qur'anic teachings and traditions and great attention is given to it by the mystics and the mystical tradition. The three types of love with their corresponding beloveds and their three interpretations can be summarized by the following chart:

	True	Virtual	False
Mystical	Divine Essence	Divine Names and Attributes	Other than Divine Essence and Names
Philosophical	Intellectual Realities	Intelligible Attributes	Natural and Material things
Worldly	Material things	Means to Material things	Transcendental and Other-worldly Realities

Chapter 6 – Mythological Fall

I. The First Veil

The man who is traversing the Path according to the dictates of his nature and spirit ultimately witnesses the light of the divine Face and comes to know the Divine Names and Attributes, such as are the quintessence of all things. Such a man, in coming to know God, first understands his own reality and the fact that he is but a sign of God; second, he sees in things their divine character and knows them to also be the words of God. Moreover, every such thing conveys to him a divine message and he listens to it, heart and soul. Now because he is himself the manifestation of the Greatest Name of God and is His vicegerent and representative in creation, he also conveys the speech and message of God to them. Hence he is not only the Word of God—like Jesus, but he is also, like Moses, the Speaker of God.¹

To live in a world whose every part and portion is imbued with a divine life and consciousness is to live the good and holy life. Those who live such a life are fully aware of the inner reality of things and for this reason never feel alienated in the world. They experience a world that is full of beauty and is founded on a divine knowledge and awareness and hence feel that they are living in a most sound and harmonious order. But the man that is incapable of these heights is deprived of the vision of God's countenance and attempts to locate his self amongst a host of false "selves" which in reality are themselves the products of his thoughts and deeds. The first veil and impediment which was the cause of man's fall from grace is the veil of the self—self-centredness or pride. It was this that made Satan and man to become expelled from the first Edenic abode and creation. When Satan rebelled and became arrogant, he became centred on his own self and said,

¹ The Qur'an names Jesus as the *kalimatu Allah*, and Moses as the *kalimu Allah*.

أَنَا خَيْرٌ مِنْهُ خَلَقْتَنِي مِنْ نَّارٍ وَخَلَقْتَهُ مِنْ طِينٍ

I am better than him, You created me from fire and You created him from clay.ⁱ

God puts forth Satan's self-centredness as the root cause of his rebellion and this rebellion as the reason for his fall from heaven. He said to him,

فَاهْبِطْ مِنْهَا فَمَا يَكُونُ لَكَ أَنْ تَتَكَبَّرَ فِيهَا

Then get forth from this (state), for it does not befit you to behave proudly therein.ⁱⁱ

To glance upon the infinitude of the divine countenance means to not see any other thing. In the same way, to look at other things acts like a veil which prevents and impedes the vision of the face of God. This is because while man looks upon any thing in an independent manner, he loses the ability to see the unlimited reality. Infinite, nondelimited existence does not leave any room, so to speak, for any thing else to exist on its own—neither horizontally, alongside it, or vertically, below it.

To lose knowledge of God and then to forget Him, in its own turn, leads to oblivion regarding both the truth and reality of man. It is to forget the fact that he is a bond and connection with God. It is also to forget that the world is sign of God. It is in this way that, all at once, man finds himself situated in a world whose true reality he is oblivious of.

The new world that man finds himself in after the Fall, is a world hidden and buried under the veil of a deceptive and false self. In other words, the world is now itself false and deceptive.

The consideration of the self as an independently existing reality leads to a similar belief about other things. This is because this consideration is as a "veil" and screen, behind and due to which the infinite reality of being disappears. After its

ⁱ Qur'ān, 7:12

ⁱⁱ Qur'ān, 7:13

retreat, all existents, which were once united in lieu of their common bond with this one single reality and appeared as its aspects and emanations, now materialize as independent and multiple existents.

Upon leaving his true and original home and divine abode, man finds himself in a strange world in which he recognizes neither himself nor any single thing around him. He feels alienated from God and creation. This is despite the fact that man's false "self" is in the centre of this world. In other words, even though this new world begins with the "self", this self is really on the periphery, as it gives rise to a multiplicity which puts it on par with all other existents. Being a stranger in a strange land man is afflicted with restlessness, anxiety and fear. Now these attributes spring from the very heart of the "reality" that man has himself fashioned and conjured up, hence they persist so long as the false reality persists.

As long as man considers existence and being to pertain to himself, he in fact flirts with non-existence and nothingness. This is because in any situation where true existence is negated, non-existence is affirmed. To explain, any quiddity that man posits for himself—such as *homo sapiens*, *homo faber*, etc.—and considers in a distinct and independent way in his mind, is essentially neither existent nor nonexistent. When its essence is regarded, this reality or quiddity possibly does not exist and it only requires a simple negation for the mind to pass the judgement that it does not exist.

Man's reality is nothing other than the connection, relation, nexus, and total indigence that he has in relation with God. In other words, man is nothing but a sign, symbol and indicator of absolute being. It is by virtue of this relation with God that he comes to know himself and the world and gains some semblance of peace and solitude. But when he stops seeing himself to be a sign and name of God and begins to carve out for himself a portion of reality—all his own—he becomes oblivious and totally blind of his true self and the world. This "self-subsisting" reality then becomes a mirage for him and fools him. If he deliberates upon this mirage and by so doing gets closer and closer to it, he finds only nothingness. This

"nothingness" is the sign of the displeasure of God and His anger. It is that very hidden hand which says no and stops the uninitiated from entering the mysteries. What remains then for those false claimants and pretenders who wish to storm the inner realm in this fashion but that they should end up in a debilitating nihilism and scepticism.

While the "reality" and "world" of the pretenders and intruders remains, there is no opening towards the Reality of the world. However if the self-styled "reality" is surrendered to its true Owner, then the gates are flung open and man can once again return to nestle in his original state of unity and *tawhid*.

II. Veils of Darkness

Fear and anxiety issue from the very depths of the false existence and reality that the estranged man, deprived of divine flashes and inspiration, creates and appertains to himself. While man in his distance from the Divine Presence continues to engage in inane thoughts, he refers and relates that which has its roots in his own soul to the environment—something which actually lies on the level of his veiled "reality". Consequently, even though he himself is the veil and covering for the outer world, he sees the outer to be a veil and impediment for himself. Hence instead of attempting to change his own state and soul, he goes about trying to change his environment.

Man feels discontented and alienated in his environment. If in changing this situation he begins his emigration from his own self and soul, and puts aside his false "self" and ego, he arrives at his true home and returns to God. The Qur'an says,

وَمَنْ يَخْرُجْ مِنْ بَيْتِهِ مُهَاجِرًا إِلَى اللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ ثُمَّ
يُذَرِّكُهُ الْمَوْتُ فَقَدْ وَقَعَ أَجْرُهُ عَلَى اللَّهِ

...And whoever leaves his home migrating toward God and His Apostle, and is then overtaken by death, his reward shall certainly fall on God...ⁱ

ⁱ Qur'an, 4:100

But if man does not embark upon this emigration to the cradle of his being, he—feeling himself to be alienated—inevitably becomes preoccupied with altering his temporal conditions and rearranging the things that he has set up around himself. This is because he is never content with his present situation and mistakenly places the source of discontent to lie in his environment and hence attempts to change it. But such alterations do not get him any closer to reality and only serve to increase his alienation. For not only is the cause of discontent that existed before also present at the moment of change and thereafter, but the change itself is the result of that same cause and its ascendancy.

And so it is that this unremitting alienation and discontent continuously speed up the movement towards a new world. This accelerated movement, not having any other cause than escapism, does not have a set goal and ideal towards which it moves and by the arrival at which, it could bring rest and peace. This very movement away from the existing situation towards "making new", which goes by the name of modernity, now becomes the goal and purpose itself. For the modern world, any and all such goals and ideals are like mirages which serve to justify the provisional status quo. While man and the community are in pursuit of newness, the immediate goal—just as a mirage for a thirsty man—leads them on. When they arrive at the goal, they find themselves once again in the previous condition—but more intensely than ever before and with a greater oblivion, they now start off in swift pursuit of the next goal.

The accelerated movement along this path imprisons man in the entrapments of his own mental constructs and physical discoveries—every moment that passes only increasing his distance from the reality that his human nature craves. The opacity of the thickening veils continuously disfigures the vision of that reality, which is now hidden behind many and variegated mirages, until that vision becomes so weak that it borders on the verge of fading out of sight and mind and becoming totally forgotten. It is in this way that alienation, scepticism, nihilism and unreality come to be accepted as the certain des-

tiny of man. Having accepted this, man comes to the end of his escape from reality and resigns himself to life and death amidst his own fabrications.

The immanence of death is not something that by any means reduces the fear, alienation and anxiety of the modern man. Rather death—which is seen as the end of continuous “becomings”—is the bitterest of facts and ends. For what really takes place for such a man after death is that the inner reality of his deeds and actions, the entrapments of his amoral behaviour, and divine judgement appear as eternal hellfire.

What has been covered so far was the interpretation of alienation from the religious perspective. In this perspective, man, due to his oblivion and ignorance of the divine bounds and his forgetfulness of God, ends by forgetting his own self; And by returning to God, by way of attention to Him, he gains insight and understanding into himself and the world.

The Qur’ān, which is the instructor of *tawhīd*, holds that the reason for man’s forgetfulness of himself is his forgetfulness of God. It warns man of this by saying,

وَلَا تَكُونُوا كَالَّذِينَ نَسُوا اللَّهَ فَأَنْسَاهُمْ أَنْفُسَهُمْ
أُولَئِكَ هُمُ الْفَاسِقُونَ

And do not be like those who forget God, so He makes them forget their own souls. It is they who are the transgressors.ⁱ

In some traditions from authoritative sources there is talk of the precedence and priority of the knowledge and awareness of God to the knowledge of the self, and even its priority to the awareness of all things. In one tradition from the sixth Imām of the Shī‘ah, Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq⁴³ (upon him be Peace) for instance, it is said, “The created being does not perceive anything but with God.”ⁱⁱ

ⁱ Qur’ān, 59:19

ⁱⁱ Ṣadūq, *al-Tawhīd*, p. 142, see also *al-Kāfi*, vol. 1, p. 86.

III. A Return or An Escape

If man, after his rebellion and expulsion from the abode of original creation, does not repent and take up the path that leads back to the origin, he finds that he is estranged from himself and the world around him. Thus unreconciled, he embarks upon various attempts to interpret and justify the world, man and the human situation, which includes his own profound alienation.

Man's reality goes back to his connection, relation and bond with God. It transcends space and time and lies in eternity. Hence in the divine interpretation of man, which is man's true interpretation, there is mention of God speaking with man in the morning of pre-eternity and before there "was" any space or external and concrete existence. Hence the covenant made between God and man in that dialogue, on terms that spoke of man's obedience to Him and the avoidance of the worship of Satan, is not in any way coloured by the demands of time and space. This covenant then, once it has dusted itself free of temporal limitations, makes time and space themselves sacred and gains the capacity and potential to be fulfilled in all periods and all places. God in the Qur'an says,

أَلَمْ أَعْهَدْ إِلَيْكُمْ يَبْنَىءَ آدَمَ أَنْ لَا تَعْبُدُوا
الشَّيْطَانَ إِنَّهُ لَكُمْ عَدُوٌّ مُبِينٌ وَأَنْ أَعْبُدُونِي هَذَا
صِرَاطٌ مُسْتَقِيمٌ

Did I not exhort you, O children of Adam, saying, 'Do not worship Satan. He is indeed your manifest enemy. Worship Me. That is a straight path'?ⁱ

The primordial covenant⁴⁴ is an ever-present reality for man. Consequently the path of repentance⁴⁵ and return to God is always open. God is forever calling man. He calls him

ⁱ Qur'an, 36:60-61

to repent and calls Himself the Acceptor of repentance. He says,

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا تُوبُوا إِلَى اللَّهِ تَوْبَةً نَّصُوحًا

O you who believe! turn to God a sincere turning...ⁱ

When Adam (upon him be Peace) was tricked by Satan and fell from paradise, God showed him the path of repentance. Adam accepted this path and repented, and God accepted his repentance. This is described in the Qur'ān in the following manner,

فَتَلَقَّى ءَادَمُ مِنْ رَبِّهِ كَلِمَاتٍ فَتَابَ عَلَيْهِ إِنَّهُ هُوَ

التَّوَّابُ الرَّحِيمُ

Then Adam received certain words from his Lord, and He turned to him clemently. Indeed He is the All-clement, the All-merciful..ⁱⁱ

The prophets and saints are exemplars for humanity who have remained true to the divine covenant throughout human history and, as a result, each and every one of them is a source of grace in the natural world. They are like sparkling and bubbling springs which, every once in a while, surge forth onto the plane of temporal history and create thereby a culture and civilization that is rooted in the sacred and in accord with man's heavenly dimension. Now it is precisely because their mission and calling is of a divine nature that it retains its integrity and unity amongst the vicissitudes of the world. They are to be contrasted with those others who have left their heavenly abode but have not taken up the path of return, and in fact have moved farther away and now wander in bewilderment amongst the labyrinth of purely human affects and artefacts in search of their true "selves".

This latter group puts forth claims of all types and colours regarding man and the world. These claims, due to the absence

ⁱ Qur'ān, 66:8

ⁱⁱ Qur'ān, 2:37

of a bond and connection with anything substantial, incline towards various multiplicities and by regarding them as being independent, take on different historical forms through the course of time. Every new interpretation appears in a certain time, continues for a short period and eventually disappears—giving way to the next claim in line.

These constant changes and alterations during the course of history only add to man's distance and remoteness from God—sending him into the utter darkness of scepticism and nihilism.

IV. Myth and Polytheism

Because man has been created with a divine nature and because—as has been explained in many traditions¹—intellect is God's first creation, it can be concluded that *tawḥīd* and the worship of the One was historically prior to polytheism and the worship of the many. What's more, man's first discourse was with God and it was the first man who received words from God and became His messenger. Now it is because man's essence has been fashioned upon the divine nature that the call of *tawḥīd* springs from his very heart and is present in all the stages and periods of polytheism and *shirk*, and even perseveres after them. But *shirk*, on the other hand, is in its very essence a historical phenomena. After the original rebellion and fall, *shirk* comes about due to man not taking up the path of return and repentance. Postlapsarian man, in turning away from the infinite face of God, begins to see the angels and other holy entities—which up until now were the messengers and voices of God—in a discrete and independent manner. Such a man, in the veil of his soul, sees these spiritual entities as lords of species, forms, and multiple gods. This is the first stage of *shirk* and in it the natural and material world does not comprise the sum total of man's vision. There is still official recognition of metaphysical realities as factors and elements which influence physical events.

¹ Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 1, p. 97.

If the sons of Adam after the fall had taken up the path of their father, which was repentance and return, they would have once again found the way of *tarwīd* and would have been witness to the beatific vision. But those of them who took the path of rebellion turned their backs on that reality which had disappeared from their sights—the one divine Command. By thus denying the unseen, they saw what had come about as the sum total of reality and became afflicted with *shirk* and polytheism.

The world that the polytheists carve out for themselves in their first landing after the fall is not purely corporeal. Though they have descended from the highest heaven of unity, they have not cut their ties with the middle states of being—which are metaphysical in the sense that they are higher than the physical level. They still have access to the intermediate world but no longer see its inhabitants to be the signs and manifestations of the One God, rather they see them in a discrete manner and as independent existents that take the place of the One God or are placed alongside some superior deity.

The observations and visions of the polytheists on this level are not the result of a sound and clear encounter with reality. They are, rather, the effect of his soul delving into the realm of his subjective imagination⁴⁶ and the interworld of his being. The intermediaries of divine grace and effusion, which are the manifestations of the Divine Names, also appear to the polytheist in the form of the lords of species and deities of the pantheon. The polytheists try to overcome the suffering and alienation of the natural world by taking recourse in and approaching the mythical gods and heroes.

The method that man uses in this stage to approach the gods is one that is based on psychic means. In this way he does indeed acquire supernatural powers.

Believers in myth resorting to supernatural forces is akin to today's man availing himself of natural and material methods. For example, modern man—in his discrete and independent purview of the natural world—comes to consider and use medicine for his ills and becomes cured and sees the cure to lie in the doctor or the medicine itself. In a similar fashion, the

mythological man who sees the metaphysical world in a separate mode takes advantage of that world in carrying out his actions and gives all the credit of his actions to the entities of that world. From the perspective of the monotheist on the other hand and according to his belief in the unity of God's acts, no action whatsoever can be seen in a discrete manner and attributed to other than God. All acts, including the act of healing, go back to God. God being "the Healer" then means that healing and curing in principle are to be appropriated to Him or that every instance of healing is by His hand. Of course it must be noted that this perspective does not negate the intermediaries and means. Intermediaries, including such things as medicine, are the names of acts of God. Medicine manifests God the Healer and His acts.

According to the Qur'ān, the prophet Abraham (upon him be Peace) was made to gaze upon the spiritual dominion of the heavens and the earth.

وَكَذَلِكَ نُرِي إِبْرَاهِيمَ مَلَكُوتَ السَّمَوَاتِ
وَالْأَرْضِ وَلِيَكُونَ مِنَ الْمُوقِنِينَ

Thus did We show Abraham the dominions of the heavens and the earth, that he might be of those who possess certitude.ⁱ

But Abraham did not just see God in the spiritual world of the dominion and in the otherworld, he saw Him while he ate and drank in the natural and corporeal world. He saw Him while he was ill and then was cured. In all states and all things he would see the acts and hand of God. Abraham said that it was God,

الَّذِي خَلَقَنِي فَهُوَ يَهْدِينِ وَالَّذِي هُوَ يُطْعِمُنِي
وَيَسْقِينِ وَإِذَا مَرَضْتُ فَهُوَ يَشْفِينِ

ⁱ Qur'ān, 6:75

وَالَّذِي يُمِيتُنِي ثُمَّ يُحْيِينِي وَالَّذِي أَطْمَعُ أَنْ يَغْفِرَ
لِي خَطِيئَتِي يَوْمَ الدِّينِ

...Who created me, it is He who guides me, and provides me with food and drink, and when I get sick, it is He who cures me; who will make me die, then He will bring me to life, and who, I hope, will forgive me my iniquities on the Day of Retribution.ⁱ

Abraham saw not only his life and death to be in God's hands, but also his food and drink. In his daily life he sees the everyday means and methods to be effective but does not see any of them in a discrete manner and separative mode.

Wherever a man who is incapable of a vision of God and who even simply disbelieves in Him goes, and whatever period he finds himself in, he finds himself imprisoned in veils and obstructions.

Even when such a man makes use of metaphysical and supernatural intermediaries, he does so without seeing them to be the signs and indicators of God. Due to this first mistake, a veil and screen descends upon the world, which during the course of his fall makes him to lose sight of the path of ascent and to see himself on par and, eventually, in contention with the many deities that fill the pantheon of mundane multiplicity. In this spirit of competition with the gods, man takes to himself heavenly and supernatural forms and attempts to achieve eternal life and procure for himself divine airs and stations. It is in this way that the self-centred hubris of man hides behind the masks of the lords of species and the gods and goddesses of the pantheon and occasionally shows itself through expressions such as, "I am your lord, the most high."ⁱⁱ

ⁱ Qur'ān, 26:78-82

ⁱⁱ Qur'ān, 79:24

V. Topography of Polytheism

As was previously explained, *shirk* is the result of a distorted and convoluted human perspective on reality. It is a purely human fabrication and does not correspond to being and reality. Hence it is a strictly historical phenomenon in that it takes on different facades in different periods of history. *Tawhīd*, on the other hand, because it pertains to the very origination and creation of the world and man, is an eternal reality and truth—absolutely unchangeable. *Tawhīd* is the truth and the truth is fixed and eternal. *Shirk* is falsehood and falsehood has neither permanence nor any one single form. For instance to speak the truth on any matter is to say one thing, while there exist many different forms of portraying something false about that matter.

Now while *shirk* has a historical character and takes on many shapes and forms during the course of time, its progress in history takes up a certain path that is continuous. While the "achievements" of polytheists do not have any real connection with human nature and hence are devoid of substance, they nonetheless show resilience and are transmitted from generation to generation by means of social education and the communal process. Due to its innate human nature, the new generation always has an unqualified relationship with God within its reach. But the historical predicament of this generation also means that it has to deal with the inherited polytheistic baggage of bygone generations.

The Qur'ān, in many places, refers to both the role of social instruction and the family environment in passing on polytheistic beliefs from generation to generation, as well as to the potential and capability of every individual to counteract these influences by recourse to his divine nature. For instance the Qur'ān speaks of Abraham in this way,

إِذْ قَالَ لِأَبِيهِ وَقَوْمِهِ مَا هَذِهِ التَّمَاثِيلُ الَّتِي أَنْتُمْ
لَهَا عَاكِفُونَ قَالُوا وَجَدْنَا آبَاءَنَا لَهَا عِبَادِينَ

When he said to his father and his people, 'What are these images to which you keep on clinging?' They said, 'We found our fathers worshipping them.'

In mentioning the comments of the polytheists to Moses the Qur'ān reports,

قَالُوا أَجِئْتَنَا لِنَلْفِتْنَا عَمَّا وَجَدْنَا عَلَيْهِ آبَاءَنَا

They said, 'Have you come to us to turn us away from what we found our fathers following?'

In another place it is said of the disbelievers and the polytheists,

وَإِذَا قِيلَ لَهُمْ اتَّبِعُوا مَا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ قَالُوا بَلْ نَتَّبِعُ مَا
أَلْفَيْنَا عَلَيْهِ آبَاءَنَا أَوْ لَوْ كُنَّا آبَاؤُهُمْ لَا
يَعْقِلُونَ شَيْئًا وَلَا يَهْتَدُونَ

When they are told, 'Follow what God has sent down,' they say, 'We will rather follow what we have found our fathers following.' What, even if their fathers neither applied any reason nor were guided?

The above quoted verse along with some other verses holds intellection and thought to be an indelible and fixed reality with the power to correctly judge irrespective of the influences of previous generations. The intellect is rooted in the divine nature of man and is the inner voice of God Himself. God reminds man in the Qur'ān of the innate knowledge of the Divinity that every man carries, and hence of the possibility of resistance to the ways of his forefathers:

ⁱ Qur'ān, 21:52-53

ⁱⁱ Qur'ān, 10:78

ⁱⁱⁱ Qur'ān, 2:170

وَإِذْ أَخَذَ رَبُّكَ مِنْ بَنِي آدَمَ مِنْ ظُهُورِهِمْ ذُرِّيَّتَهُمْ
وَأَشْهَدَهُمْ عَلَى أَنْفُسِهِمْ أَلَسْتُ بِرَبِّكُمْ قَالُوا بَلَىٰ
شَهِدْنَا أَب تَقُولُوا يَوْمَ الْقِيَمَةِ إِنَّا كُنَّا عَنْ هَذَا

غَافِلِينَ

When your Lord took from the Children of Adam, from their loins, their descendants and made them bear witness over themselves, [He said to them,] 'Am I not your Lord?' They said, 'Yes indeed! We bear witness.' [This,] lest you should say on the Day of Resurrection, 'Indeed we were unaware of this,'

أَوْ تَقُولُوا إِنَّمَا أَشْرَكَ آبَاؤُنَا مِنْ قَبْلُ وَكُنَّا
ذُرِّيَّةً مِنْ بَعْدِهِمْ أَفَتُهْلِكُنَا بِمَا فَعَلَ الْمُبْطِلُونَ

or lest you should say, 'Our fathers ascribed partners [to God] before [us] and we were descendants after them. Will You then destroy us because of what the falsifiers have done?'¹

The verses above clearly show that even though shirk or polytheism is not rooted in the very heart and mind of man, it nonetheless grows out of his ignorance and oblivion and spreads through the generations by way of habit, familiarity and instruction.

In the topography of polytheism, every generation finds itself in an environment and context that its predecessors created for it. If man, thus placed in a culture of polytheism does not repent and begin the return, he ends up adding to the density and accumulated deposits of polytheism in his culture.

¹ Qur'ān, 7:172-173

These deposits, overtime, and in each successive generation, take on the form of a new social reality which consolidates itself through social rituals and habits and is passed on to the next generation in the same way.

VI. The History of Myth

The man who remains ignorant of the reality of the human state and the universe, creates a working picture and model of reality for himself at every stage of the fall. None of his self-fashioned worlds suffice in giving him stability and peace of mind. Hence at every step he struggles to create a new picture and at every level of his efforts a new veil and screen is introduced that further obfuscates the reality of man and the world. In this manner the continuous history of polytheism endures.

The first stage of the fall is the descent from the heaven of divine unity. In this stage, whatever is seen in the natural or imaginal worlds is no longer a sign or indicator of the One God. It is rather the sign of the intermediaries and agents which are mistakenly seen to be discrete and independent existents. The world of myth begins precisely at this stage. During the course of the levels and stages that follow, man's connection with heavenly and imaginal realities becomes weaker and weaker yet. Until finally, there remains no trace of even the broken and skewed visions of those realities that he previously had. Those unsound visions and apparitions become totally hidden and the perspective of polytheistic man now becomes one that is purely worldly and material. He sees nothing but matter and feels only the physical.

In some traditions and verses of the Qur'ān, there is allusion made to some of these levels. There is mention of the fact that the devils and those who are under their authority are either totally or partially prevented from gaining access to the heavens. Their being grounded is in fact due to their vision becoming entirely terrestrial. These traditions prove that disbelievers and polytheists of the past were adepts of supernatural and metaphysical powers and that these powers were slowly taken from them.

Their is a tradition on the authority of Imām Ṣādiq (Peace be upon him) in which he said, "Satan would tear through the seven heavens but when Jesus (Peace be upon him) was born he was blocked from three heavens and would race through four heavens; but when the Prophet (God's blessing be upon him and his progeny) was born he was blocked from all seven and Satan was pelted by falling stars."ⁱ

'Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'i⁴⁷ comments on the heavens and the fact of the devils being expelled from them:

What is meant by the heaven of the abode of the angels is the spiritual and angelic realm which subsists on a higher plane. The relation of that world to the corporeal world is akin to the relation of the physical sky to that of bodies on the ground. What is meant when it is said that the devils approached the heavens and "eavesdropped" is that they would come close to the angelic realm to gain a knowledge of the secrets of creation and future events. What is meant by their being expelled and driven out by stars is that they were driven out by light from the spiritual dominion and angelic worlds as they did not have the strength to bear it....ⁱⁱ

Some verses of the chapter of Jinn in the Qur'ān also speak of the closing of the gates of heaven for the jinn upon the birth of the Prophet (God's blessing be upon him and his progeny). In referring to this new incident the jinn said to the Prophet,

وَأَنَا لَمَسْنَا السَّمَاءَ فَوَجَدْنَاهَا مُلِئَتْ حَرَسًا
شَدِيدًا وَشُهُبًا وَأَنَا كُنَّا نَقْعُدُ مِنْهَا مَقْعِدَ اللَّسْمَعِ

ⁱ Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 15, sec. 3, hadith 9, p. 257, and Ṣadūq, *al-Amālī*, majlis 48, p. 285.

ⁱⁱ Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabā'i, *al-Mizān*, vol 17, p. 125.

فَمَنْ يَسْتَمِعِ الْآنَ يَجِدْ لَهُ شِهَابًا رَصَدًا وَأَنَا لَا
 نَذَرِي أَشْرُ أُرِيدُ بِمَنْ فِي الْأَرْضِ أَمْرًا أَرَادَ بِهِمْ رَبُّهُمْ
 رَشَدًا

Indeed We made for the heaven and found it full of mighty sentries and flames. We used to sit in its positions to eaves-drop, but anyone listening now finds a flame waiting for him. We do not know whether ill is intended for those who are in the earth, or whether their Lord intends good for them.¹

The above verses indicate that with the coming of Islam, a new situation took shape with regards to the devils and the heavenly dimensions and realities of creation.

VII. The Death of Myth

With the closing of the gates of heaven, the scope of vision of the polytheists was limited to terrestrial multiplicities and there no longer remained any room nor chance to live the lies of the mythical gods and heroes. According to the adulterated perspective of the polytheists, the mythical deities were involved in the coordination and regulation of affairs in the material and natural world. These gods themselves were the result of the mistaken and erroneous interpretation of the polytheists with regards to heavenly and spiritual realities. But when the doors of heaven were closed on them, the actions of the heavenly existents disappeared from sight. Now invisible, mythical gods survived in the form of stories and folk tales in the collective memory of cultures, which, over time, grew weaker and weaker. The images of the deities and mythical gods had been based upon the visions and perceptions of oracles, shamans, sadhus, warlocks and magicians who would use satanic forces

¹ Qur'an, 72:8-10

and powers to gain access to the angelic realms. When this channel was no longer open, they were reduced to accounts and stories that had been passed down from the ancients or which were, at best, a reflection of the personal hopes and desires of the storytellers or of the listeners.

These myths are not fundamentally based in reality and are the result of an incorrect interpretation of divine angels and forces. Hence, when these heavenly existents are no longer seen and perceived, there is no longer any room for the subsistence of the erroneous interpretations associated with them. For man, by turning away from the Divine Presence and becoming veiled by his own self-centredness at the outset, came to acquire a skewed and obscured vision of heavenly realities. At this stage and in line with his new egoism, he pictured himself to be somewhere between an idol and a god. He went on to set up his personal and social life according to this picture. But now, in the historical progress of *shirk*, there no longer remained any trace of the heavenly realities. In this period, man was forced to take his first steps towards a new picture of the world and of himself. In this picture and model, there is neither mention of the One, nor even a faint and vague image of any of His divinely ordained intermediaries; the heavenly dimensions of man's existence being almost totally forgotten. The new and modern man that now emerges, is neither a sign and indicator of God, nor is he a Pharaoh who puts on airs of divinity and wears the masks of various deities.

Just before the emergence of modern man, man did not see and have a direct vision of God's face, but he did at least perceive intelligible and universal realities. This man, in his occult visions of the imaginal realm, saw idols, images and icons which, if nothing at all, gave news of the existence of the intellectual realities. He held these very same deities and idols to be controlling and administering the affairs of the natural world.

Plato proved the existence of the intelligible forms and ideas by using rational proofs and held that true knowledge lay in a vision and perception of these metaphysical realities. He also spoke of the Good and there exist many indications and references to *tarwîd* and monotheism in his thought and cor-

pus. At the very least it can be said that there is ample room in his thought to make a *tawhīdī* interpretation very possible. If, for example, the Good is an absolute and infinite reality, then the Platonic ideas are nothing but His intermediaries. There is no doubt that Plato lies at the pinnacle of Greek thought and that his philosophy is the manifestation of its most transcendental aspects. The civilization that Plato lived in was one which had distanced itself from monotheism and had taken on a totally mythological character. Zeus was not the One and Absolute divinity. Not being absolute, the world is not seen as his act. Hence the unity of acts (*tawhīd af'ālī*) is not a perspective that is available to the man of myth. Zeus has rivals amongst the other deities alongside him and Hellenic man is not considered to be the Logos and representative of God. This man is rather an existent that takes part in the rivalries and wars of the gods and by doing so carves out a portion of being for himself. The famous oracle of Apollo at Delphi was attended by a priestess who transmitted the messages of that god to the people. When a request for a teacher and guide was made, the oracle pronounced Socrates the wisest of men. Socrates, who was already an established philosopher, believed this to be a message from heaven and spent the remainder of his life and even gave his life in acting upon this prophecy.

Many traces of the existence and vision of intelligible forms and realities can be found amongst the various levels and aspects of Hellenic thought, or at the very least there is a clear defence of the metaphysical. Socrates, who was a master of conceptual and discursive methods, never—on this account—called himself a savant and man of learning. Rather he referred to himself as a lover of wisdom or “philosopher”. This is because he held that true knowledge was only acquired by entering the intellectual realm and having a vision of the intelligible forms. In his time visions of the imaginal realm, in the form of popular myths, were also given a prominent and respectable place.

When *shirk* and the polytheistic mentality gave up its connection with the heavenly realities, the adepts of myth could no longer indulge in their satanic tampering of the transcen-

dental realms of being. From this time onward the mythic quest could be nothing more than a collection of acquired and discursive concepts. Rational thought, when it too cut its ties with heaven and the immaterial intellects, lost its intuitive basis and its access to the eternal realities. Having lost its roots, it now attempted to find them in the lowermost aspects and states of being. It turned to the corporeal and material world and consequently rational concepts were considered to be purely mental devices or alternatively, attempts were made to reduce them to the level of empirical phenomena. In this way, myths lost all their existential and substantial content and humanity came to lie in wait for a new dispensation and modern world.

VIII. Monotheism and Polytheism

With the advent of Islam, alienated and homeless man, having been ousted from his true existential home and remaining aloof from *tawhīd*, is now also deprived of any vision of his own heavenly dimensions and capacities. From then on he progresses towards a picture of the world and man that is totally "solid" and spiritless, while at the same time being the cause of anxiety and restlessness.

For some time, the world of *shirk*, which was now more than ever before moving toward multiplicity, made use of its past. But sooner or later it had to embark upon its new mission. A part of this mission was, without doubt, the rendition of a new picture for man and the world.

This new picture could first take shape in that part of the world that had the least number of impediments to it. The most important impediments to a purely terrestrial interpretation of man and the world are firstly, the presence of *tawhīd*, and secondly, the persistence of the habits and beliefs leftover from mythical times in the popular culture of the people.

The world of Islam could not be the scene for the formation and manifestation of this new interpretation which man in his most fallen state seeks. This is because Islam is the torchbearer of *tawhīd* and its light is a fundamental impedi-

ment to the formation and spread of the polytheistic interpretation of existence. Now multiplicity is not the totality of reality but rather the manifestation of unity, hence it follows that *shirk* cannot be the final destiny of man. The appearance of the final stages of *shirk* in the latter days is in fact a function of the dawn of Islam. This is because the coming of Islam coincided with the expulsion of the satanic forces from the heavens. The manifestation of Islam in fact meant the fullest expression of the Divine Names and Attributes. It was in this period of history that when the Truth manifested Itself by Its greatest name, falsehood engaged all of its resources and *shirk* came close to its final historical phase. Hence the latter days are witness to a new and decisive confrontation between *tawhīd* and *shirk*.

Islam, by its sheer presence, started a serious battle with a carnality that was in the depths of darkness and in its final days. The Qur'ān, as a guiding light and a book that has remained uncorrupted and untouched by satanic men and jinn, is Islam's invincible bastion in this epic battle.

The Qur'ān consoles the breasts and heals the hearts of men. It heals the wounds sustained by the believers in the continuous attacks on their thoughts and actions in their war with *shirk*. Hence, despite all the offences of the disbelievers in this period of severe disbelief and *shirk*, the pattern of *tawhīd* is still alive and well in the thoughts and actions of the Muslims.

Basing themselves on the Qur'ānic faith, the Muslims after their initial political victories and in their first encounters with the world of unbelief and *shirk*, were able to free from it and its mythological culture those elements that were rooted in human nature. In doing so, the Muslims made it possible for these elements to further develop and grow. For example, in their meetings with the remnants of Hellenic civilisation, which was thoroughly mixed with mythical and polytheistic ideas, they only took its intellectual tradition. This tradition was rooted in the wisdom of the prophet Idrīs and eventually found its way into Islamic thought. From the earliest days of its presence in the Islamic universe, this tradition sought to acquire a heavenly mandate by attempting to prove the exis-

tence of the ideas and the intelligible forms and to set up the system of divine intermediaries.

In his works, Fārābī⁴⁸ does not limit wisdom to a conceptual and discursive knowledge based upon deductive proofs and the like. He searches for the roots of knowledge amongst divine flashes and inspirations and calls a person a perfect philosopher and wise man only if he is an intellectual who is given to sacred faculties and has a direct connection with the angelic world of the intellects. He in fact is searching for Divine Revelation and in the perfect city that he envisions; he puts forth the idea of the rule of the divinely appointed saints.¹ Peripatetic philosophy, even with its inclinations towards the conceptual, does not refrain from proving the existence of the intelligible world of the ideas. For instance, even though most of Avicenna's treatises are on the knowledge of the soul, he readily admits to the impotence of conceptual knowledge in the same and holds that the awareness of the self is prior to thought.

Shaykh al-Ishrāq, Suhrawardī, in his *Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq*, holds that the knowledge of the soul is intuitive and emphasizes that the completion of wisdom lies in the wayfaring from the material world to the vision of heavenly realities. He wrote many treatises on the idea of the fall of man in which he outlined his descent from the intelligible heavens to the imaginable realm and his final alienation from his divine abode. Finally, Mullā Ṣadrā⁴⁹ in his *Ḥikmat Muta'aliyah*, in interpreting the resurrection of souls and intellects, speaks of the goodness of existents in their new dispensations and of their essential non-existence with reference to the divine in the various levels of the seen and unseen worlds. It is in this way that the intellectual tradition, through the continuous efforts put towards it in Islamic history, appears as a guiding light leading man towards a life

¹ Fārābī, *Kitāb al-Siyāsah al-Madīnah* (Tehran: Al-Maktabah al-Zahrā', 1366), 79.

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that has been described by the divinely ordained prophets and saints.

Chapter 7 – Alienation

I. Renaissance and Rebirth

History testifies to the fact that the outer and outward aspect of reality is intimately intermingled with the inner. So the place where the physical sun goes down turns out also to be the place where the light of truth wanes and sets. This is so because the lowest stage of the fall of man took place in the geographical west and the most degraded interpretation of man and the world appeared for the first time in this part of the world in the form of a new culture and civilisation. This new interpretation, in its initial stages, took form as a movement which has come to be called the Renaissance. Renaissance literally means “re-birth” and the movement was named such because it was the reconstruction and return to life of the culture of classical Rome and Greece.

One interesting question that remains to be answered is, why does this movement not see itself to be the natural product of its own immediate history? In other words, why doesn't it see its historical roots as lying in the Middle Ages and instead traces them back to the Rome and Greece of antiquity? Furthermore, was what came about in the Renaissance a new life and rebirth for that which existed in history or was it a new cultural phenomenon that was being born for the first time?

The Hellenic world of antiquity was a world of myths and pantheons. In the civilisation of the time, more than ever before, man paid greater attention to multiplicity; the One having receded into oblivion, forgotten. In confronting this pantheism of Greece and Rome, Christianity became an obstacle to their advance and expansion.⁵⁰

Despite its effectiveness in combating the polytheistic world of its past, Christianity gradually came under the sway of the clergy and became ensnared in mythological interpretations of its doctrines. The official account of the doctrine of the Trinity by the Church is a vivid example of the encroach-

ment of the mythological perspective into Christian life. This transformed and mythological face of Christianity—a traditionally monotheistic religion—meant that it could no longer perform its function as the defender of the speculative and practical frontiers of monotheistic doctrine.

During the period of the Renaissance, worldly powers, in their contention with the Church, proliferated worldly and secular ideas which, in time, gave rise to a new intellectual and cultural movement. Now due to its greater attention to the realm of multiplicity and the mundane, this trend or movement saw itself to be more closely related to the culture of the Greece and Rome of antiquity than to that of medieval Christianity.

While the Renaissance was indeed a circumvention of Christianity and a throwback to pre-Christian times, it was not a full return to the true context of Hellenic culture and civilisation. The latter was mythological in nature and the Renaissance western world had already surpassed Christianity—with its mythological admixture¹¹—and so did not really and fully return to classical and mythic Greece. While it is true that the mythological perspective is oblivious of the *tawhīdī* or monotheistic outlook, there remain in it traces of the spiritual and of the super-natural heavens. The post-Renaissance western world on the other hand, had turned to a purely material and natural interpretation of man and the world. Hence the West's "return" to classical Greece really meant gravitating towards the historical current in which the classical Greek myths took form, and not towards the myths themselves.¹² With the appearance of Christianity the pantheistic and pagan Greek culture was put on hold. Initially it began to influence and infiltrate Christendom by amalgamating Church doctrine and myth. In the end, after having worked through Christianity, it attempted to continue its movement towards greater multiplicity. In travelling this path, the West has taken steps and trod on ground that would be strange, even for the Greeks.

II. Rationalism and the Enlightenment

Following the Renaissance, the transcendental realms of being faded from the sight of western man and a material world emerged to fill his field of vision and action. As a result of this fall, the existential roots of knowledge and science were lost and a rational knowledge that was purely conceptual and discursive (*mafhūmī*) came to take its place.

Rationalism was a new form of intellectualism that came to prevail over modern man's epistemology and realm of knowledge. The major themes of this intellectual movement revolved around those universal concepts that were current in the realm of acquired knowledge.

Even though intellectual intuition was not explicitly denied in this movement—as it was in the writings of Kant—it was nonetheless not given any specific cognitive importance. One outstanding characteristic of Pre-Renaissance and Islamic intellectual thought, on the other hand, was that it was open towards the transcendental realms of existence and knowledge. The intellect was God's inner messenger and proof (*hujjah*) and would itself demonstrate the existence of supra-intellectual realms of cognition and knowledge. It would reveal those higher states of being whose superiority it was well aware of. Moreover, it would find rational proofs to prove that it could not reach the very essence of those levels.

Post-Renaissance rationalism played a mediating role in the passage from the religious to the material outlooks and the displacement of religious knowledge by empiricism. After Descartes (one of the first rationalist philosophers) began to doubt the views of past generations and of the Church, he attempted to find his own self amongst concepts that were of a mental order and sufficed himself with the picture thus obtained. He was of the belief that "I" could be cognised and understood by speculative thought. This is because he considered mental concepts to be the most obvious realities and

things that could not be doubted. In proving his own existence he stated, "I think, therefore I am".¹

Descartes attempted to prove the existence of his own soul by way of conceptual thought, or at least to find his self on the level of his own thought and mental processes. This form of rationality is at its basis weak and invalid and is, moreover, mixed with ignorance and error. In the two proofs that were previously covered, Suhrawardī clearly demonstrates that man's knowledge of his own soul is intuitive. Before Suhrawardī and some six hundred years earlier than Descartes, Ibn Sīnā presented intellectual proofs to show that man can never know himself from his own effects—whether these effects be mental or concrete in nature—and that prior to his acquired knowledge and thought, man knows himself directly.

Ibn Sīnā's proof speaks exactly to the Cartesian argument and those that resemble it. He is of the belief that any given effect by which one attempts to prove the existence of self, when it is not delimited (*muqayyid*) by one's own self and is mentioned in an unconditional sense, can never prove the existence of one's self. For instance, if it is said "thinking exists", or "writing exists", it can never be concluded from this "hence I exist". If we take thinking or writing to be attributes that require a distinct subject, then the knowledge of thinking or writing can lead to the conclusion that a thinker or writer must exist. But this does not prove one's existence. Now if the effect is mentioned delimited and conditioned by "I"—for example if it is said, "I think" or "I write"—then it can then be said and concluded "I am". But in this case the "I" was not derived from "thinking" or "writing". Rather the "I" was alongside the "thinking" or "writing" from beforehand or was known to the person a priori, appearing in the first sentence as the pronoun "I" and sometimes as "my".

Descartes was of the opinion that awareness of thought led to awareness of self, while man's knowledge of himself is prior to the awareness of thought and is not achieved through the mediation of thought, acquired concepts or anything of the

¹ In Latin, *Cogito, ergo sum*, is a now famous dictum that was coined in 1637 by René Descartes.

like. Hegel, continuing upon the lead of Descartes and the rationalists of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, attempted to account for all dimensions of reality by way of mental and rational universal concepts. Regardless of whether he was successful or not in the end, he explicitly announced that something which cannot be conceived has no external reality.ⁱ

The new intellectualism claimed that all of existence was within its purview and that it had the ability to shed light upon its entirety. This intellectualist movement, now called the Enlightenment, went on to deny all things that were beyond the bounds of man's demands for conceptual knowledge—those things which the conceptual and discursive reason of man was incapable of understanding in their essence and reality.

In Hegel's thought, the reality of existence is rational.ⁱⁱ According to him, reason is that which manifests itself in man's understanding. Hegel defines as self-conscious those parts of being which have a rational knowledge of themselves and of other things. He describes how existents—through global rational transfigurationsⁱⁱⁱ—move in a continuous way in stages from self-alienation to self-consciousness. When Being thus reaches to the stage of the fully thinking and rational man, it obtains an understanding and explanation of its own reason and of the world—thereby becoming self-conscious. From this perspective, the rational and thinking man is a complete being. He is the perfect man, and the ideal social system is one in which all the interrelations and affairs revolve around a knowledge and understanding that is solely rational. According to Hegel, all other types of knowledge—including religious awareness and knowledge—correspond to periods of man's past history and his different stages of self-alienation.

ⁱ "Truth in philosophy means that concept and external reality correspond" wrote Georg Hegel (1770-1831) in the "Introduction" to *The Philosophy of Right*, Addition 16 (1821; tr. 1942).

ⁱⁱ Hegel is often quoted as having said, "The rational is the real".

ⁱⁱⁱ Hegel called this process the dialectic.

III. From Myth to Ideology

Even though the word "ideology" was used from the 19th century onwards, what it refers to actually already existed for two centuries prior to its common usage. This is because what ideology refers to is the assemblage of beliefs, values, dos and don'ts that are posited by man's acquired and conceptual thinking concerning his worldly life. These beliefs and ideas surfaced during the Enlightenment, when religious traditions and heavenly mandates were in decline. This assemblage was defended by the very same reason and thinking that claimed to expound and explain all the various dimensions and facets of the world. There was a falling away of the restraints and guidelines of religion and a corresponding strengthening of the human ego. The connection with the higher realms that was fostered by religious tradition was severed. The mythic tradition, which arises from the unfolding of unseen realities in the veil of the soul, faded and died. All these transformations prepared the ground and provided fertile soil for the formation of an array of different ideologies.

By the removal of the authority of Revelation and the sacred sciences, what traces there remained of religion and tradition in the form of human social customs and habits, were reconstructed by mental models of interpretation under titles such as "Protestantism". In these new renderings, the unseen and spiritual dimensions of religion and tradition, as well as the secrets and mysteries whose interpretation is beyond the reach of conceptual knowledge, are labelled superstitions and are thus eradicated. Hence the remnants of religion and myth now continue their existence in the form of religious ideologies or ideological religions.

The refinement of religion from the superstitions and innovations that it has accrued is not a new thing. All the prophets and saints, within the domain of any single divinely ordained tradition, have always sought to cleanse their religion and divine law from these accretions. But what is a new development, and one that slowly takes shape only after the Renaissance, is the change in the accepted standard for distinguishing a superstition from its opposite. From the religious perspec-

tive, an innovation or superstition is something which is not based on either the external "messenger" nor the internal—that is to say, it does not have roots in Revelation, nor is it verified by sound intellect and formal proofs. According to the perspective that slowly became popular in the 17th and 18th centuries, all that could not be—in its essence—perceived by human reason was typified as a superstition. In actuality this movement led to the elimination of Revelation and divine law. In other words, a type of deism and antinomianism came to characterise religions that passed through the strainer of rationalism and freethinking of the 17th and 18th centuries.

Deism, or religion without a sacred law, was a minimized religion in which there was no trace of direct divine speech, guidance or law. Religion without a sacred law is the same as "natural religion". That is to say, a religion whose various aspects are the result of man's mental researches and the play of his rational concepts. The god of such a religion is not the reality through whose vision and light man could come to know himself; rather it is in light of thought and reason—which is but one of many human traits—that it comes to be understood and explained. It can be concluded that this religion is exactly similar to that type of phenomena which came to be known as "ideology" in the 19th century.

During the Enlightenment and even as late as the 19th century, all the various ideologies were in search of the "lost city" or the perfect state³³ that religion and myth had given reports of. That is to say, all of these ideologies, in addition to drawing up grand schemes and systems for man and the world, wanted to design a society and social system that would save man from the status quo—something that he did not want or desire. These ideological societies were so planned that they were, apparently, in accord with man's nature and, by removing restrictions and impediments, they would secure his wants and needs. From the perspective of these ideologies, human freedom has a rational reality and they attempt to make it realizable in the societies that they envision. This is because in these societies, that which man naturally desires, is catered for

and that which is an impediment to man's natural wants and needs, is done away with.

The subsistence of religious traditions depends upon the intuitive knowledge and religious awareness of the prophets and saints of God. Such awareness is acquired by extinguishing false being and treading upon the ego. It is also a fact that the continuity of the world of myths hinges upon man's connection with the heavenly realities through the veil of his soul. In a like manner then, the formation and subsistence of modern ideologies is intimately tied to the new rationality which denies supra-rational modalities of cognition and understanding. Now if reason, according to its true nature, established connections with superior realms of knowledge and accepted the fact that true knowledge of self is beyond the scope of concepts and acquired knowledge and is in need of intuition, then it would retract its false claim concerning the rationality of all of being. If reason did this then instead of being a veil it would act as a torch which would shine light upon things beyond itself. Hence, the formation of ideology pertains to that period of time in which reason—in its incomplete and defective form—fell into fallacy and error and claimed to replace religion. Of course, when this type of rationality remains aloof of permanent and immaterial realities and puts its trust in the man of this natural world—a world characterised by vicissitudes and change—it no longer is able to explain and justify itself and begins a rapid decline. After its abdication, it is another type of knowing—by way of the senses—which takes the reigns of power in the modern world.

IV. Empiricism and Scepticism

Sensationalism has a long record in the history of polytheism (*shirk*) and the Qur'ān repeatedly speaks of its presence amongst the tribes of Israel. But its presence in the past was not in the form of an organized and modern philosophy. It was only after the Enlightenment that this epistemological current, for the first time, took form as an ordered system of philosophy. Bacon⁵⁴, Berkeley⁵⁵, Locke⁵⁶, and Hume⁵⁷ are some of

the empiricist and sensationalist philosophers of the 17th and 18th centuries who set the scene for empiricism, but it was really only in the nineteenth century that this current of thought came to dominate all fields of science and knowledge. The common thread that runs through all empiricist philosophies is that they hold the senses and sensorial data to be the only reliable method of grasping reality and the only source of human knowledge. This aspect of empiricism was opposed to that of rationalism. Rationalists saw reason to be an independent and reliable source and contrasted it with knowledge acquired by the senses. During the Enlightenment, rational and conceptual knowledge was labelled as the purest form of knowledge.

The ascendancy of empiricism meant that metaphysical propositions and then ethical and value-laden propositions were removed from the realm of knowledge and science. This is because the verity or falsity of such propositions could not be established by empirical methods and sensorial data. By the eradication of the metaphysical, a new meaning was given to "knowledge" and "science". This meaning of science was in direct opposition to theology and philosophy. Thus the word "science"—which once used to refer to religious and intellectual knowledge—now, in the modern rendering, came to be used only for material and empirical data. It was in this fashion that science lost most of its substantial matter—that which in the past was counted as its basis and foundation.

The negation of judgements of value led to the separation of knowledge and morality, meaning that scientific propositions were used in natural science and had a pragmatic role, whereas value propositions only signified the subjective and psychological inclinations of individuals or society.

Eliminating the above mentioned propositions meant that what was left in the realm of the knowable were only those propositions that spoke of sensible existents. These propositions, which were necessarily presented in an experimentally verifiable form, could never yield certain knowledge of the reality of the sensible world. What they did do was play an instrumental and pragmatic role in man's domination of the

natural world—a place which man was now fully and totally immersed in.

Empiricists initially thought that empirical methods would provide certainty in all fields of knowledge. For instance, Bacon believed that all errors and fallacies, which are due to man's inclination to construct mental idols, could be prevented by following his inductive tables.¹ But gradually a truth dawned on empiricists that was known from ancient times to those acquainted with intellectual knowledge. The latter knew that no law of science is a direct product of the senses and sensorial data. Rather, it is the human mind which, beyond the level of physical sense, is active in the formation of the law. This involvement of the element of the mind reduced empiricism's confidence in scientific laws. It was due to this fact that empiricists came to hold experimentation as a necessary condition in the formation of scientific laws. They could thence keep the workings of the human mind in check by way of these experiments.

The first impressions of the empiricists led them to believe that the success of scientific theories in experiments is conclusive proof of their truth. But this affirmative perspective of the positivists was a dead end. This is because the success of a universal theory in some particular instances is no guarantee that this theory will be true for all presumed cases realized in the future. Now the question that arose was, if scientific theories are not proven by experiments, then what exactly is the role of experimentation in the genesis of modern experimental science? Some speculators, like Popper, have sought to explain this unverifiability by terming it a natural feature and consequence of experimentation. That is to say, they hold that scientific theories are actions of the mind which, after they are invalidated, prove the possibility of invalidity. Another important point that quickly became apparent was that, just as conclusive verification was not possible in experimental science, by the same token, unverifiability and invalidation was also out of the question. In this way, certainty was eliminated

¹ Bacon speaks of these "idols" of the mind and the inductive "tables" in the *Novum Organum*.

from both sides of scientific propositions and theories—neither could they be categorically affirmed nor negated. Others, such as Ayer⁵⁸, held that scientific theories were verifiable. That is to say, experimentation was useful in verifying the scientific activity of the mind. This suggestion too, did little to secure any cognitive content for science.

True sensorial knowledge is never devoid of its intellectual and supra-intellectual foundations. It is for this reason that when empiricists proceed to doubt and deny the cognitive content of non-sensorial and non-experimental forms of knowledge, they are in fact undermining their own foundations of knowledge. Hence empiricism, from the outset, is devoid of a firm and logical foundation and scepticism becomes its inevitable fate.

V. Humanism and Pharaonism⁵⁹

Following the ascendancy of empiricism, scientific knowledge acquired features which ultimately affected the picture of man and his place in the universe. While there lingers any trace at all of intellectual thought, there remains the possibility of dialogue between various ideologies. This is because the intellect—or intellectual knowledge—has the capacity to make judgements about dos and don'ts and the existents of the unseen realm. The picture that man draws of himself, after his denial and obliviousness towards the unseen, is a picture that is "man-centred" and humanist in nature. That is to say, it is a picture in which man is no longer the sign and indicator of God, and there is no ascent and path ahead of him. In this portrayal, there is no comprehending Reality that encompasses worldly and natural man. So there is no need for man to overcome the lower levels of his existence to reach that Reality.

Sculptors and painters after the Renaissance no longer halloed the ideal and perfect man and no longer covered his natural and carnal aspects and parts. This being the case and due to some remnants of intellectuality, philosophers attempted to "intellectually" clothe man in various rationalist ideologies and by resorting to natural rights. They were of the

opinion that the resulting humanity, with recourse to rational and scientific methods, could supersede all religion and its imaginary, non-scientific approaches. While a residue of intellectuality and rationality still existed among the empiricists, a number of them expected scientific knowledge—even in its experimental sense—to produce ideological systems for man. Based on these expectations, some of them forged ahead and produced schools of thought and ideologies for themselves. This trend, which peaked in the nineteenth century, was short lived and the scientific ideologies it fostered soon came to an end. The science of the nineteenth century which had become a tool in the hands of ideologues such as Marx⁶⁰ and Comte⁶¹, ended its days by being disparaged as a “stupid science”. With the advent of empiricism and its concomitant ideas and their denial of scientific and rational ideologies, the findings of these ideologies lost all authority. Pharaonism, in the form of a stark and flagrant humanism, ascended to the throne.⁶²

Humanism is the supremacy of man. Supremacy is not to be mistaken for nobility. The supremacy of man is opposed to his vicegerency. Throwing light on man's relation with reality can bring this issue to a close. Is reality the measure of man or is man the measure of reality? If man gains meaning in the light of reality, then the perfect man is the manifestation of the Real and the vicegerent of God. But if reality is made meaningful by way of man, then man himself becomes a veil of Reality and an impediment on the path to It. To say that man is as a veil, covering or impediment to the Real, is to say that he has become arrogant and Pharaonic.

The first act of Pharaonism and selfishness obstructed man's vision of infinite Reality and of the Divine threshold, and caused him to enter into the mythical realms. It was at this stage that Pharaoh saw himself to be one of the gods and many lords of power and in a spirit of rivalry he proclaimed, “...I am your lord, the highest”.¹ The Pharaonism of man—man who had cut his ties and bond with Reality—did not survive for long in the mythical and imaginal world, and man fell

¹ Qur'ān, 79:24

even from there. After his departure from the mythic realm, man attempted to delineate his existential dimensions and limits by resorting to researches of the mind. It was precisely in this period of man's intellectual history that human rights, in the sense of being opposed to God's rights or the rights of Revelation and myth, took form. This period was also witness to the discussions and debates of theoreticians such as Hobbes⁶³, Locke, Rousseau⁶⁴ and Montesquieu⁶⁵. In this era, not only did man see himself as independent and not in need of Revelation, but he also did not perceive the powers and rivalries of the gods and heroes of myth. Man saw himself as an ordered and systemized existent, just like the other natural existents, and attempted to discover the laws pertaining to this order by efforts of the mind.

After losing his religious and rational aspects, man became limited to the confines of experimental knowledge. Then, becoming aware of the limitations of scientific knowledge and the lurking scepticism within it, man placed himself on centre stage and saw himself to be the very root of reality, the source and origin of all rights, and the standard of truth itself. He saw his will and power as capable of encompassing all realities. The first buds of this "self-awareness" could be found in the nineteenth century amongst the German Romantics. In laying out various ideologies, they did not restrict themselves to any logical or intellectual system. In this way, the priority of will and power over knowledge gained special attention in some of their discussions. It was in this setting that Nietzsche⁶⁶ proclaimed—authoritatively—that power was fundamental.

The relationship between knowledge and power has been long debated by philosophers, mystics and theologians. Theologians have usually held power to be prior to knowledge and awareness, whereas mystics and philosophers have ruled that knowledge is prior to power. The difference between the debates of these three groups with those that occurred in the nineteenth century is that the former revolved around the attributes and names of God, and the latter around man and his mundane life. In the realm of the divine attributes there is room to speak of the priority of knowledge to power. This is

so because on that level, knowledge is able to glean the certainty and necessity of its propositions from that of the Divine Essence and the latter's Absolute nature. Hence, knowledge is the first divine attribute considered to be prior to divine power and will, and it is with reference to the former that the latter attributes are able to culminate in divine succour and a creation that is both good and ordered. But on the terrestrial level of human existence, no such necessity and absoluteness can be found. As a result it is not possible to fulfil the requirements of scientific and logical propositions and provide them with certainty and verifiability. Hence that which is observed in the case of man, are acts that spring from the limits of his resolve, will and power. On this level, knowledge has no recourse and authority other than this observed and actualised reality. But the problem remains that the will and power of man is incapable of performing the role of the Divine Essence and is not able to be the source and origin of necessary realities. It is for this reason that such human knowledge ultimately gives way to the vicissitudes of the human will, in the form of cultural and social changes, and thus becomes unbalanced and confused.

What the German Romantics of the nineteenth century were initially concerned with, became the prime concern—on a widespread level—for the inheritors of positivism late in the twentieth century. Post-modern thinkers, being aware of the scepticism inherent in the foundations of modern science, admitted its insufficiency and lack of authority and concluded that human will and power was prior to human knowledge and awareness.

The image of man that is formed in this period is not a cognitive one. This is because knowledge and cognition were seen to be the consequences of human will and resolve and hence were considered too weak to be able to conjure up any picture of man whatsoever. Hence the presiding image of man was one which had no intellectual and cognitive backing and which portrayed him as the standard and verifier of all things. Man was now a god who had superseded all the gods of history. He did not see any higher principle or reality above himself so he could not be a sign or indicator of that reality. Nor

did he see any multiplicity around himself so he did not need to distress himself by competing with it and rivalling it. He was now the unrivalled god who ruled the realm of multiplicity with his own self-styled legitimacy and power, setting the standards and deciding on what could be called truth and what falsehood. Man's Pharaonism was now stripped bare, starker than ever before in all of history.

VI. Liberalism

Man's self participates in all the idols of history. It is for this very reason that his self is the greatest idol the most serious enemy that he has. "Your greatest enemy is your self that is with you".

Satan's fall from grace was due to his arrogance and self-centredness. Man was cast from heaven for the same reasons. Consequently, man, in all the stages of the Fall, worshiped idols which actually took form in the veil and screen of his selfhood, as he no longer saw beyond the level of the soul—having been prohibited from the Divine Presence. But of course the self, despite that fact that it mediated the very existence of these idols, initially remained hidden behind them. That is to say, in their own turn the idols themselves became a veil and covering for man's Pharaonism—keeping it from being openly seen. In due time this covering was cast off and the modern world was exposed to the naked form of a great idol—in the guise of the most basic and fundamental fact of existence—humanism. The removal of the veil from this ancient idol, in the form of a brazen, unabashed humanism, coincided with the abrogation of all past religions and divine laws.

The word for divine law in Islam is "*sharī'ah*", which literally signifies the path that leads man to water. In all the religions of history there was the concept of a distance between man and the god that he worshiped that had to be traversed. *Sharī'ah* or the divine law, was precisely the path crossing this

ⁱ Ibn Fahd al-Hilli, *Uddatu al-dā'i*, vol. 1, p. 295. This is a tradition of the Prophet (God's blessing be upon him and his progeny).

distance. In the monotheistic religions, the only true god worthy of being worshipped is God, Almighty. The Islamic profession of faith, "There is no god (worthy of worship) but God...", negates all gods other than the Real. Monotheistic laws and canons facilitate man's return to his existential origin and abode. Wayfaring on the path and following the dictates of divine law and religious tradition is the only way for man to save himself from the consequences of the Fall and become free of the prison that he has placed himself in. The purpose of religious doctrine is to free man.⁶⁷ By reaching the Divine Presence, man in fact arrives at his home and original abode, thereby coming out of exile and out of the prison that the world has become for him. It is for this reason that in Islamic terminology, the House of God—the Kaaba—is the first house that was established for man¹ and is also the *Bayt al-'Atīq*,¹¹ or literally the "Free House".

In the journey of the mythical realm, man's position was gauged according to a celestial geography and his freedom or imprisonment was assayed in reference to the rivalries or friendships that he had with the gods of the pantheon. Mythological religions claimed that, by way of their rites and rituals, they could return to man his lost celestial powers and save him from his talismanic role in the terrestrial world. But there was a new idol on the scene; man's own self and ego. Terrestrial and worldly man was now a god who spoke audaciously of the fundamentality and principality of himself.⁶⁸ With the advent of this idol, there was no longer any room, nor chance, to speak of religion or of wayfaring on the path. Man's soul and self was always with him and hence man, wherever he happened to be, was already at home and in his element. He was the landlord, and there was nothing beyond his kingdom. Hence there was nowhere to go, no journey to speak of, and no need for the religious path and wayfaring along it. Any place that could possibly be imagined, man could create it here. Any trip that could possibly be conceived, man could plan it out. There was no reality beyond himself, and there

¹ See Qur'ān, 3:96

¹¹ See Qur'ān, 22:29 and 22:33

was no awareness and knowledge outside the scope of his will and desire. Science and displays of power and control were the tools of his freedom and might. It was in this way that technology became all knowledge and understanding. This new god not only approached religion from a technological perspective, but—it can even be said—that technology became his religion and canon. Technocrats did not present a goal, nor propose a way towards it—for their mandate was to manipulate man's environment in any and all ways that man so desired.

In the matter of man's wants and desires, technology opts to be silent, and it is the will and desire of worldly man that has become deified—a god unto itself, who answers to none, not even science and knowledge. The world of knowledge takes as its point of departure an all out surrender to that desire.

From the monotheistic and *tawhīdī* perspective, man has been created with a divine nature and hence is not limited and conditioned to anything whatsoever, being meant for God and only God. From this perspective, postlapsarian man is caught up in the bonds and shackles of conjectures and delusions such as have been placed upon him progressively throughout the history of disbelief and polytheism. Religion is the way by which man can once again return to the origin, thereby securing his freedom from these fetters. According to this then, freedom is a valuable gem and sacred reality which fallen man must acquire through effort and struggle. To reach the goal of freedom a certain path must be traversed. There are certain conditions, some necessary and others possible, that apply and are appropriate to this path. The necessary conditions are composed of obligatory (*wājib*) and prohibited (*ḥarām*) actions. The possible conditions consist of actions that are disliked (*makrūh*), preferred (*mustaḥab*), and indifferent (*mubāḥ*). But when man's worldly self and terrestrial nature becomes afflicted with illusions of grandeur and puts on airs of divinity, man forgets his own true self and reality. This oblivion keeps him from his true abode—the infinite divine heavens—and leads to him becoming heedless of his essential connection

with it. Being unaware of his connection with his true home, man—in whatever state he finds himself in—sees himself to be self-sufficient and independent.

كَلَّا إِنَّ الْإِنْسَانَ لِرَبِّهِ لَكَنَّا
لَيَّطَغَىٰ أَن رَّأَاهُ اسْتَغْنَىٰ

Indeed man becomes rebellious when he considers himself
without need.¹

In another place, the Qur'ān reprimands man who thinks that he has been let loose and says,

أَيَحْسَبُ الْإِنْسَانُ أَن يُتْرَكَ سُدًى

Does man think that he has been left to wander aimlessly?²

Now the man who now makes claims of divinity and who believes that he has been left alone can never accept the dos and don'ts or the musts and must nots of the path that has been set to take him beyond himself. From his perspective, these prescriptions and proscriptions are within his own jurisdiction, and only gain value and validity in reference to his will and resolve. Hence in relation to his humanity, everything becomes licit. Such a person sees himself to be free, in actuality and at present. The new religion that arises after the advent and predominance of man's selfishness and egotism—and which abrogates all other religions—is this very actualised freedom which goes by the name "liberalism". Given all this, liberalism is really nothing other than libertinism, antinominism and freethinking. That is to say, in reference to the will of man, it sees all things as being allowed. This "religion" then, is not the endeavour of terrestrial man to secure and attain his true freedom. It is rather, his attempt at exposing and explicating the "freedom" of worldly man with a view to maintaining the status quo.

¹ Qur'ān, 96:6-7

² Qur'ān, 75:36

VII. The People's State

The ideal state and political system of the god of the modern world is formed according to his religion's fundamental principles. It is not a society which is based upon man's heavenly and divine rights, nor on his natural and intellectual rights. Rather, it is a society that is based upon the mutable opinions and sentiments of people. The political expression of such a society is that people's state which goes by the name of democracy or the rule of the people, by the people and for the people. In contrast, when religious beliefs are present or during the period when man is still conscious of heavenly realities, the ideal system is one which is based upon religious knowledge and dependent upon divine approval and decree—or in other words, it is the theocracy, the rule of God, or *civitas Dei*. While this ideal remains alive in the mind and culture of a society, the ruling powers and systems, which are not connected to the unseen world and which do not open up to the heavens, are forced to explain themselves in religious terms and depict themselves as channels and mediums of the divine realm and as the divinely ordained repositories of God on earth. But after man's Pharaonism and self-centredness exposed itself in the form of a stark humanism and came to dominate the culture and mentality of society, liberalism came to be accepted by society as a modern religion and democracy as the ideal state and utopia. In these circumstances, all governments—even the most violent tyrannies of history—took up the banner of this false god and justified their rule under the cover of democracy and the rule of the people. In a democratic society and people's state, the right to rule is the monopoly of the man who has unabashedly enthroned himself as god. Henceforth, if a citizen intends to enter this society, he must beforehand stand at the gates of this city which has been founded in the name of secular liberalism and freedom and with all gusto he must proceed to the altar and sacrifice all gods and all religions, once and for all. A person in the people's state is respected as an honourable citizen only if he begins and ends all discourse in the name of terrestrial man and his freedom. If he fails to do this, his speech is not heard, nor

is his vote respected, nor even counted. When a citizen of such a state casts a ballot in the name of God, he is in fact testifying more to his own divinity than to that of the Lord of the worlds. Those who do not believe in their own godhead when voting—those who see themselves as not the creators of truth but rather its seekers—are not worthy of suffrage in a democratic system. Such people are only allowed to vote for an apparently religious matter and in an outwardly religious manner, if and only if they have previously—before their entry into the people's state—turned their backs upon the spirit and essence of religion and offered it at the altar of democracy.

In this city, religion and the sacred are allowed the right to exist only through terrestrial man's intercession. That is to say, the outward acts and institutions of religion are given licence to live only due to the respect and reverence that the vote of the people has. Voters must be well aware that the right of existence is with themselves and that any religion or ideology that is not in line with their wants and desires, has no value and validity whatsoever. For if voters do not consider sovereignty and the right to rule to be the natural right of man, as was pointed out by Mill⁶⁹ in the nineteenth century, they would be better off in a dictatorship, on this condition that the tyrant and dictator musters up all his powers and forces to eliminate their religious beliefs and promote humanist and liberal ideas amongst them. According to some liberalist theoreticians of the twentieth century, such as Popper⁷⁰, those who have not made it to such a level of belief in the right of man, are as children who do not have the competence to run their own societies. Hence another part of the world, viz. the west, must take up the responsibility of their subjection and tutelage.

Religion in the people's state can only last if it washes its hands of its heavenly roots and principles and, as a manifestation of purely human and mundane aspects of life—interpreted in humanistic terms—it turns its back on its own divine canon and proclaims its allegiance to the law of the new god.

After the Renaissance, through the period of the rationalists, and while there still existed residues of rational thought in the discourse of the empiricists—that is, while ideologies still kept a cognitive façade—democracy was intertwined with ideological expositions. For instance, every ideology claimed to be fulfilling the true wants of people. In this period, religion was overrun, as it were, by enlightened freethinkers. Religion would now only have a chance of surviving if it was interpreted in the form of one of the ideologies of the time. But when the pillars of rational knowledge also caved in, democracy lost its last limitation and inhibition and appeared in its most naked form as the sovereignty of the human self and ego. In this period, the democratic interpretation of religion also gives up on rational and intellectual modes and popular appeal becomes the only remaining arbitrator of the truth and presence of religion in society. Be it as it may, democratic religion is a religion that has turned away from divine law and tradition and has no access to the esoteric realm and the divine secrets. This religion, which now appears as one of the fleeting tendencies and wants of people, can do no more to affect the personal and social lives of man than to advise him to follow the dictates of the great idol which has been erected in the town square.

This idol, which appears in human form, bears no veils. It does not derive its sanctity from its relation to God or the gods of heaven, and hence has no reason to be erected in the Kaaba, the temple, or even the pantheon. This idol holds its holiness to pertain to its own essence and, consequently, even if it bears a torch in its artificial arms, its flame does nothing to light and show the way to the realms beyond. The only fire that it does have is one that is the result of darkness and one that is unable to light up or warm even the frozen and lifeless hands of the idol. There is no path ahead of him—the path is something that might be reached by retracing the footsteps behind him. To worship this idol is to worship man's lost soul and to embark upon a path that has no goal and that can end only in disarray and confusion. There is no goal, but there is movement, as the lost soul always tries to escape from

where he is. This perpetual escaping only expands his false identity and is simply unending change and diversion.

VIII. World in Limbo

Man's explanation of his alienation follows his views on his nature and reality. From the religious perspective, self-alienation is the result of forgetting God. In Hegel's view, the self-alienated man is he who does not take recourse to a rational exposition of himself and the world. Empiricists and those who describe the external world in purely natural terms, give meaning to themselves according to their own definitions of man and the universe. Feuerbach⁷¹ held that the self-alienated man was the one who gave his absolute needs and infinite desires a heavenly form and then began to worship it. From this point of view, the real object of worship is man himself, and it is the unenlightened novice who is unaware of his own self that worships others. Of these views, the most materialistic and dense opinion with regards to self-alienation is that of Marx. He held man to be a social and class oriented being and explained self-alienation in terms of class phenomena. He believed that the proletariat class were self-alienated because the capitalists would give their work only superfluous value. Hence Marx, unlike Hegel who saw self-alienation to be a rational phenomenon, rooted it in the lowest levels of human existence—viz. man's physical and temporal labour. This indicates that Marx searched for man's essence and reality on this level of being. In his opinion, the person who has his work taken away from him, has his very being and reality negated. Until the products of their labour are not returned to them, the workers are self-alienated. Hence, even the capitalist, who has not lived his life with the fruits of his own labour and who lives off of the efforts of others, is also self-alienated.

From the perspective of Marx, in the same way that self-alienation is a social and class phenomena, its resolution is also to be found in the social sphere. So when the socialist state is realized, every individual in the state will earn according to the amount of work that he does—doing away with self-

alienation in the process. If there is growth in the tools of production, then just as labour became a social trait, these tools of production also find communal expression—leading to the promised heaven on earth where every person can consume as much as he wants. Therefore, with the elimination of self-alienation, man's total freedom is also realized.

Hegel gives alienation a rational quality. In his opinion, self-consciousness has a historical framework. As a result it is only in a particular period of history that man arrives at a rational knowledge of himself and the world. This period gives rise to a certain social system, a system which has bureaucracy as its outstanding characteristic.

The bureaucratic system, as described by Weber⁷², is rational and goal-oriented. But nearly two centuries after Hegel, and now more than ever before, this system has shown its effects on society. In a similar fashion it has been over a century now since the demise of Marx and the socialist system that he articulated has been put through the test. In spite of the promises made by the defenders of these two systems, alienation, mental disturbance, and restlessness, and many human and psychological problems and difficulties, have not only not been reduced, but have in fact grown in intensity and frequency.

The attraction of the systems and the response to the summons of individuals such as Hegel and Marx was a result of their being rational or pseudo-rational. But in the face of the impotence of science in providing access to fundamental reality and the disclosure of a hidden scepticism within the entrails of empiricism, these systems and claims collapsed altogether. The question now arises, how can a "cognitive" system and science whose role is purely instrumental—in that it has no other effect than increasing man's control and power over nature—come up with a plan for the ideal state, one which is responsible for putting man in touch with ultimate reality?

Scientific theories are inherently incapable of making judgements on issues of value and metaphysical propositions. They are formed within the parameters of those metaphysical propositions which man chooses for himself based on his self-

centred tendencies and wants. The latter are mainly aimed at securing his material means. It is in this way, by an act of his own will, that he is able to conjure up various "worlds". He sees himself as the creator of the world that he devises around himself. When he finds some time away from his unending mechanisations and discoveries, he comes to admit the purposeless and derelict nature of the world in which he lives in. This admission itself is due to the fact that he is the living and highest example—unparalleled in history—of the divine censure previously quoted, "Does man think that he has been left to wander aimlessly?"ⁱ The aimlessness and purposelessness of man, who is himself the interpreter and middle term of the interpretation of being, leads to the world also becoming purposeless and in a state of limbo. All the knowledge and learning that could possibly be used to understand and change the world has been denoted as without purpose and meaning. Describing this absurd purposelessness becomes the most real science. Man does not begin this expose by taking recourse in instrumental or experimental theories—scientific as they are called—but rather by drawing on the perceptions of his dark and sullied soul. Yes it is true, terrestrial man thinks himself to be without a purpose and goal, and it is this very belief that makes his life unbearable and full of sorrow. The man of divine nature, on the other hand, in accordance with this nature, does not rest until he partakes of the beatific vision and witnesses the infinite beauty and majesty of God. The person who is deprived of this vision, notwithstanding all his apparent means and leisure, lives a difficult life. This difficulty is exactly and precisely the result of his blindness toward the infinite reality of the world and this blindness will become apparent when the Reality manifests Itselfⁱⁱ. God says in the Qur'an,

ⁱ Qur'an, 75:36

ⁱⁱ On Resurrection day.

وَمَنْ أَعْرَضَ عَنْ ذِكْرِي فَإِنَّ لَهُ مَعِيشَةً ضَنْكًا
وَنَحْشُرُهُ يَوْمَ الْقِيَمَةِ أَعْمَى

But whoever disregards My remembrance, his shall be a
wretched life, and on the Day of Resurrection We shall
raise him blind.

قَالَ رَبِّ لِمَ حَشَرْتَنِي أَعْمَى وَقَدْ كُنْتُ بَصِيرًا

He will say, 'My Lord! Why have You raised me blind,
though I used to see?'

قَالَ كَذَلِكَ أَتَتْكَ آيَاتُنَا فَنَسِيَهَا وَكَذَلِكَ
الْيَوْمَ تُنْسَى

He will say: 'So it is. Our signs came to you, but you forgot
them, and thus you will be forgotten today.'ⁱ

ⁱ Qur'ān, 20:124-126

Endnotes

1. In the very beginning of his philosophical classic *Asfār*, Mullā Ṣadrā quotes a tradition from Imām 'Alī, upon him be Peace, to this effect that: "May Allah have mercy on the man who works out his soul and prepares for his grave, and knows where he came from, where he is, and where he is going". Mullā Hādī Sabzawārī, in his commentary on the *Asfār* expounds on this tradition in the following manner:

The first "where" refers to the origin, (as alluded to by the tradition) "God was and there was not any thing with Him"; and the third ("where") refers to the destination, (as alluded to by the verses) "Indeed to your Lord is the return." [96:8] and "Everything is to perish except His Face." [28:88] The first is the arc of descent and the Fall, (as referred to by the verse) "Get down from it, all together!" [2:38], while the third is the arc of ascent and the Rising, (implied in the verses) "'O soul at peace! Return to your Lord, pleased, pleasing!" [89:27-28] Again, the first refers to the setting (or degradation) of light, (as in the prayer) "He who is covered from the sight of His creation by the rays of His light" [*Balad al-Amīn, Du'ā al-Hujub*] (and the tradition) "God has seventy thousand veils of light... and darkness". [*Bihār*, vol. 55, p. 45]. The first also refers to the Night of Ordainment (*laylat al-qadr*, as in the verses), "In it the angels and the Spirit descend, by the leave of their Lord, with every command. It is peaceful until the rising of the dawn." [97:4-5] while the third refers to both the rising (or intensification) of light (as in the verse), "God is the Light of the heavens and the earth." [24:35] and to the day of Resurrection (as alluded to by the verse), "The angels and the Spirit ascend to Him in a day whose span is fifty thousand years." [70:4] As for the second ("where"), it is the middle period and the day for journeying, (as referred to by the verse), "So travel over the land and then observe...". [16:36] It is also the day to reflect upon the signs of God, all-Majestic and all-Manifest, (as in the verse) "Soon We shall show them Our signs in the horizons and in their own souls until it becomes clear to them that He is the Real." [41:53] Tr.

2. The coming into being from non-being is a concept that was best explained in the Islamic world by Mullā Ṣadrā whereby every existent is thought to be created anew at every moment from "nothing", as it were, and to subsist through its participation in being *qua* being.
3. These ideas are variously discussed and mentioned in Islamic philosophy by such terms as: *qiyām bi nafsīhi wa qiyām bi ghayr*, absolute being and conditional or relative being, or under the discussion on copulative existence—*wujūd e rābiʿ*. Tr.
4. The term "scientific anthropology" here refers to the modern scientific approach to the study of man and includes the disciplines of physical

and cultural anthropology. As such, it precedes the debate on whether anthropology belongs to the humanities or the natural sciences.

A note on "anthropology" and its usage here is in order. The word "anthropology" comes from *anthrop-* + *-logia*, meaning the science of human beings. The word *anthropo* in Latin, and *anthrop* or *anthropo* in Greek and French means "human being". The Merriam-Webster Dictionary lists the second meaning of anthropology as the, "theology dealing with the origin, nature, and destiny of human beings". The word "anthropology" is not based on "anthropoid" or any other derivative meaning implying "ape", "monkey" or animal. The word "anthropoid" comes from the Greek *anthropooides*, meaning "resembling a human". The "-id" in this word is a patronymic suffix which means "one belonging to a (specified) dynastic line", eg. Abbasid. So "anthropoid" here means "the being belonging to the human line", or "human like". The interesting thing is that this would imply that the apes are from us and not vice versa—verifying the Islamic and traditional idea of the possibility of *maskh*, as alluded to in the commentaries of verse 2:65 of the Qur'ān and traditions from authoritative sources. Modern and scientific anthropology is usually divided into the two disciplines of physical and cultural anthropology. Philosophical anthropology is a newcomer, appearing at the beginning of the twentieth century. In this work, the author is attempting to show how all of these modern disciplines are deviations and truncated forms of the original "religious" anthropology. The latter is sometimes "posthumously" referred to as "spiritual anthropology" and is the intent of the author here in almost all cases where the word "anthropology" is used without a preceding adjective. Tr.

5. *Tawhīd* is the fundamental principle and forte of the Islamic tradition. It includes the idea of the unicity of the Godhead as well as the principal unity of all Being in both its transcendental and immanent modalities. There is no exact equivalent for this term in English. "Monotheism" will be used to refer to *tawhīd* in some cases but in general the word will be left in its transliterated form. Tr.
6. Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), German idealist philosopher who argued that discursive reason is the means by which the phenomena of experience are translated into understanding. Kant was the foremost thinker of the Enlightenment. In him were subsumed new trends that had begun with the Rationalism of René Descartes and the Empiricism of Francis Bacon. He thus inaugurated a new era in the development of philosophical thought. His classic works include *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781) and *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788).
7. Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), Austrian-born German philosopher. Considered the founder of phenomenology, he had a major influence on the existentialists.
8. Søren Aaby Kierkegaard (1813-1855), Danish philosopher and critic of rationalism, regarded as the founder of existentialism. He is famous for his critique of systematic rational philosophy, particularly Hegelianism,

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- on the grounds that actual life cannot be contained within an abstract conceptual system.
9. Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900), German philosopher and critic of culture, who became one of the most influential of all modern thinkers. His attempts to unmask the motives that underlie conventional Western religion, morality, and philosophy deeply affected generations of philosophers, psychologists, poets, novelists, and playwrights. He thought through the consequences of the triumph of the Enlightenment's secularism, expressed in his observation that "God is dead," in a way that determined the agenda for many of Europe's most celebrated intellectuals after his death.
 10. Putting existence into "brackets" or in limbo, in a philosophical sense, was first accomplished by Husserl. This initiative of his was in response to the problems that modern western epistemology faced in adopting the thought of Hume and Kant on the subject. Though by way of this innovation Husserl attempted to solve the problem of ontological propositions and the issue of knowledge and its signification of concrete reality, his achievement more closely resembles a "solution" in which the question at hand itself is wiped clean and removed from the scene. The effects of Husserl's phenomenology can in some manner be seen in the phenomenological-sociology of Alfred Schutz and in the ethnomethodology of Harold Garfinkel. Refer to: George Ritzer. *Sociological Theory*, 4th edition. McGraw-Hill, 1996. Farsi translation (of 3rd ed.) chapter 6, pp.321-401, Tehran: 1996.
 11. This refers to the formation of the discipline known as "scientific anthropology".
 12. Rene Descartes (1596-1650), French mathematician, scientist, and philosopher who has been called the father of modern philosophy. He radically distinguished between the mind, which he perceived as indubitable, and the body (or matter in general), which he explained on the basis of purely mechanistic principles. The axiom *Cogito, ergo sum* ("I think, therefore I am") is his most famous formulation.
 13. Georg Hegel (1770-1831), German idealist philosopher who developed a dialectical scheme that emphasized the progress of history and ideas from thesis to antithesis and thence to a higher and richer synthesis. He is quoted as having said, "The rational is the real."
 14. The word "comprehend", or its derivatives, will be used throughout to designate the translation of *ihṭāṭah*, so as to allude to the greater scope of this Arabic word than its usual English translation of "encompass". Tr.
 15. Translations of Qur'anic verses have been mostly adapted from the recent translation by Sayyid 'Alī Qūlī Qarā'ī titled *The Qur'ān with an English Paraphrase*. Tr.
 16. 'Alī ibn Mūsā al-Riḍā (765-818), upon him be Peace, after the martyrdom of his father, Mūsā ibn Ja'far, he became the eighth Imām of the Shī'ah. The conflict and jostling for power between the two sons of Hārūn—viz. Amīn and Mā'mūn—afforded him an opportunity to teach and propagate similar to the one found by Imām Ṣādiq in his time. Hence, many

of his discussions and dissertations on matters of belief and theology have been recorded and have survived for posterity. Most of the Sufi tariqahs in the Islamic world trace their chain of authority and grace to the Shi'ah Imāms through Imām al-Riḍā. He was martyred at the hands of an Abbasid caliph and is buried in Mashhad, Iran.

17. 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib (600-661), upon him be Peace, the first man to believe in the Prophet, upon him and his Progeny be Peace. The Prophet called him the gate of knowledge and chose him to be his trustee. Ibn 'Arabi held that the Imām was the closet of all people to the Prophet, the pinnacle of the universe and the esoteric reality of all the prophets of God. Ibn Sina wrote about him saying that he was amidst the companions of the Prophet just as the intellect is amongst sensible things. Ibn Abi al-Ḥadid traces all the fields of knowledge in the Islamic world back to the Imām. The book, *Nahj al-balāghah*, contains some of the Imām's letters, speeches and words of wisdom. This book, being a great source of knowledge of the Unicity of God as well as of sociological matters, comes second to only the Qur'ān in its effects upon Islamic culture. All Muslims are united in acknowledging the Imām's position and worthiness as a Caliph and successor to the Prophet; they are not united however in the case of others and are divided into the two main sects of Sunni and Shi'ah.
18. Sayyid Rūḥullāh al-Mūsawī al-Khumaynī (1902-1989), known as *Imām Khumaynī*, mystic, philosopher, jurispudent, and the most outstanding Islamic political figure in contemporary history. He lived at a time when Islam (and Shi'ism) found itself on the far periphery of the political and military paradigm established by the West and, being culturally weakened, was on the verge of internal collapse. Witnessing this state of affairs, Imām Khumaynī ardently applied himself to learning and acquiring the Islamic sciences in a comprehensive manner. By embarking upon the Path—in all of its mystical, moral and practical dimensions—he activated and became the very embodiment of the Islamic and Shi'i heritage that he carried. In his capacity as the *Marja'* (Supreme Religious Authority) of the Shi'ah of his time, and making use of the potentials that existed in the Shi'ah culture of Iran, he guided the Islamic Revolution of Iran to its eventual victory and thus introduced the Islamic world as a new player on the scene and as a pole of civilisation to the West. Some of his mystical writings include *Miṣbāḥ al-Hidāyah fī sharḥ al-Khilāfah wa al-Wilāyah*, *Sharḥ e Du'ā al-Saḥar*, *Asrār al-Ṣalat* and marginal notes on both the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* of Ibn 'Arabi and *Miṣbāḥ al-Uns* of Ibn Fannārī. His *Kitāb al-Bay'*, in five volumes, is one of his works on jurisprudence. His lessons on jurisprudence and the principles of jurisprudence have also been published.
19. Mullā Ḥādī Sabzawārī (1797-1878), one of the greatest commentators of Ṣadrā's philosophy who by his profound thoughts and teachings played a decisive role in the defence and dissemination of Islamic philosophy and culture at the critical juncture in Iranian history which was witness to the encroachment of western ideas. His comprehensive work, *Sharḥ*

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- al-Manzūmah* gained wide acceptance and became a standard philosophical text. The section on metaphysics of this book has been translated into English by T. Izutsu and M. Moheghegh. Sabzawāri was also the author of such books as *Asrār al-Hikmah* and a commentary on the *Mathnawī* of the famous Persian poet Rūmī.
20. 'Alī ibn al-Ḥusayn Zayn al-'Ābidīn (659-713), upon him be Peace, the fourth Imām of the Shī'ah who, after the martyrdom of his father and during the reign of the Umayyad caliphs, became the spiritual and temporal leader of the Shī'ah. He was the epitome of worship and piety. The political situation in his time did not allow him to openly promulgate Islamic teachings and hence he opted to compose prayers and supplications which indirectly served this purpose. The *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Sajjādiyyah*, is a compilation of some of his supplications. This book has also been called the "Psalms" of the Family of Muḥammad and its place in the Islamic universe is like that of the Psalms in the Bible.
 21. The word "creation" in English already has the dual connotations of both the act of creating and the end product or result of it. Here the author is attempting to show a similar linguistic link between *ṣiṭrah* and *maṣṣūr*, but the argument in this case, based primarily on Qur'ānic exegesis and the philosophical discussions of the preceding pages, goes beyond the realm of language and carries with it metaphysical implications of the first order. Tr.
 22. From the above explanations it can be seen that the usual translation of the word "ṣiṭrah" as "nature" can be problematic.
 23. Ḥusayn ibn 'Alī (626-680), upon him be Peace, the son of 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib and Fāṭimah, and the grandson of the Prophet. The Prophet would refer to him as "the leader of the youth of heaven" and as "the ship of salvation". After the consolidation of the Islamic state and its relative security from external dangers, internal deviations and aberrations in the Caliphate appeared. Imām Ḥusayn took a stand against these innovations and refused to swear allegiance to the Umayyad caliph, Yazīd. In consequence, he, along with more than seventy other men—friends and family of the Prophet—was martyred on the plains of Karbala in 680. His martyrdom had profound and lasting effects on the Islamic world and the history and culture of the Shī'ah. Imām Ḥusayn, upon whom be Peace, is the third Imām of the Shī'ah.
 24. See endnote 16
 25. All men, regardless of faith, have a meeting with their Lord. The only difference being that their faith and actions in this world decide which of the infinite faces of God they will see in this meeting—for God is the Merciful and also the Punisher. Christian belief also agrees on a single resurrection for all but goes on to state, "Those who have done good will proceed to the resurrection of life; and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of judgment." Tr.
 26. Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī (1205-1273), also called *Mawlānā* 'the most important Persian Sufi thinker, metaphysician and poet of all times. His *Diwān* of

- Shams-i Tabrizī* and the *Mathnawī* have been translated into many languages and are widely known the world over.
27. The fruit that they all had in mind was grapes. The four languages that they spoke were Persian, Arabic, Turkish and Greek. Tr.
 28. These four types of indication are based on the four types or modalities of existence. In this regard refer to: *Manzūmah – Manṭiq*, p. 11, *Manzūmah – Hikmah*, p. 18004, *Sharḥ al-Asmā' wa Sharḥ Du'ā Jawshan Kabir*, p. 52
 29. Shahāb al-Dīn Yahyā Suhrawardī (1154-1191), commonly known as Shaykh al-Ishrāq, is one of the most famous Muslim philosophers. Despite his short life he introduced many novel ideas that starkly contrasted Avicennian doctrines. He kept to logical methods but, like Plato, also emphasized the role of intuition, inspiration and the direct vision of realities. Suhrawardī spent much effort in trying to prove the existence of the Imaginal world—a world that is situated between the world of intellects (i.e. the Platonic Ideas or Forms) and the natural order. His most important work is *Hikmat al-Ishrāq*.
 30. To quote Shakespeare, "O, call back yesterday, bid time return." Tr.
 31. The translation is based on the reading in which the word "*tuwaffā*" is associated with the substantive clause "*mā 'amilat*" and not "*nafs*". See *Tafsīr al-Mizān*, vol. 12, p. 382.
 32. There is a parable of Jesus, upon whom be peace, to the effect that, "The seeker of worldly things is like the person who drinks salt water, the more he drinks the thirstier he becomes, until finally he dies because of the water". This narration is to be found in *al-Maḥajjat al-Bayḍā fi taḥdīb al-Iḥyā*, by Fayḍ Kāshānī, vol. 6, p. 13. A similar tradition has been reported from Imām al-Ṣādiq, Peace be upon him, in *al-Kāfi*, vol. 2, p. 136. This parable is quite frequently used by Christian writers but, interestingly enough, is not to be found in the Bible. The nearest allusion to this meaning is in John 4:13, "Jesus answered and said unto her, Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again." Tr.
 33. Franz Kafka's, *The Metamorphosis*, speaks of this reality by way of a comical fantasy.
 34. For a full, in-depth treatment of "the intellect" and its various types and levels, refer to the author's paper titled *From Instrumental Reason to Sacred Intellect*. The paper was presented at the conference on Muslims, Christians and the Challenges of Modernity, held at the Toronto School of Theology, October 24-26, 2002, Toronto, Canada. Tr.
 35. Abū 'Alī Ibn Sīnā (980-1037), known in the West as Avicenna, was the foremost philosopher in the Islamic world. In his philosophical methodology he was greatly influenced by Fārābī and though he mainly commented on the Aristotelian tradition, his penetrating inquiries led to new conclusions. While Ibn Sīnā's fame is mostly due to his achievements in philosophy and medicine, he was also a master in such fields as methodology, formal logic, mathematics and astronomy. His written works include *Kitāb al-Shifā*, *Kitāb al-Ishārāt wa al-Tanbihāt*, and *Qānūn fi al-Ṭibb*.

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36. Khwājah Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī (1201-1274), well-known philosopher, theologian, mathematician and astronomer who expounded and revived philosophy at a time when it was under attack by Ash'arī theologians. In his commentary on the *Kitāb al-Ishārāt wa al-Tanbihāt*, he aptly responded to Fakhr al-Rāzī's criticism of philosophical thought and went on to accept most of Shaykh al-Ishrāq's original ideas. He was instrumental in the establishment and progress of the observatory at Maragha. His works include *Awṣāf al-Ashrāf*, which was written in the style of the mystics, and *Tajrīd al-I'tiqād*, which expounded the theological doctrine of the Shī'ah and became the theological text *par excellence* of the entire Muslim world. Al-Ṭūsī was also active in the political realm. At the time of the Mongol invasion of Iran, he played a prominent role in the defence and promulgation of Islamic thought and culture.
37. Shaykh Muṣliḥ al-Dīn Sa'dī (1213-1292), Persian Sufi poet who wrote *Bustān* and *Gulistān*, and is one of the most eloquent and widely read Persian poets.
38. There is a phrase in the oft-repeated *Ziyārat āmin Allah*, which says, "The feasts for those who hunger are ready and the springs for those who thirst are gushing".
39. Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad Ḥāfiẓ (1317-1392), also called *lisān al-ghayb*. Persian scholar, thinker, and the greatest Persian Sufi poet who has expounded the most profound Divine mysteries in his poetry.
40. The station of "*aw adnā*", meaning "or closer", is based on the Qur'ānic verse 53:9, "So he was the measure of two bows or closer still". The verse refers to the Prophet's nocturnal ascension and the sublime station that he achieved "during" it. Tr.
41. Jamāl al-Dīn Nizāmī Ganjawī (1141-1217?), one of the greatest Persian poets and thinkers. Also called *Ḥakīm*, he was learned in many other sciences as well. He is most famous for his poetic rendering of the *Laylā and Majnūn* epic.
42. T.S. Eliot says much the same in *The Wasteland*.
 What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow
 Out of this stony rubbish? Son of man,
 You cannot say, or guess, for you know only
 A heap of broken images, where the sun beats,
 And the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief,
 And the dry stone no sound of water...." Tr.
43. Ja'far ibn Muḥammad al-Ṣādiq (702-765), upon him be Peace, the sixth Imām of the Shī'ah. He lived at a time when, due to the political victory of Islam, the Muslim world was exposed to many different cultures and civilisations—the remnants of the Hellenic world and Iran in particular. In the midst of this, he played a great role in the exposition and promulgation of Islamic science and culture. This role was providentially magnified by the fact that the political decline of the Umayyads and their ongoing skirmishes with the budding Abbasid powers, afforded an opportunity to expand the intellectual and scholarly circles of learning in Madina. The Imām continued the work of his father, Imām Muḥam-

- mad al-Bāqir, in this regard and as a result thousands of students—transmitters of traditions, jurists, theologians...—profited greatly from his classes. The Imām's position as the propagator of Shi'i learning and knowledge was so prominent that the Shi'ah sect has come to be called "Ja'fari". Imām Ṣādiq was killed and martyred by the Abbasid caliph Manṣūr.
44. This covenant is known in Islamic terminology as the *mithāq alastu*. See Qur'an 7:172. Tr.
 45. *Tawbah*, or repentance in Islam, consistent with its etymological root, gives more the meaning of objective "return" than that of moral penitence and emotional regret. The latter is not absent from the Islamic scheme but is not as emphasised as it is in the Christian tradition. From here onwards the word "repentance" will be used in its Islamic sense. Tr.
 46. The term *khayāl muttasil* has also been translated as man's microcosmic reality. Tr.
 47. Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabā'i (1904-1981), completed his higher studies in jurisprudence, *uṣūl*, philosophy and mysticism in Najaf, Iraq. From the fifties and for three decades he held the chair of intellectual sciences—logic, philosophy, and mysticism—in the *Hawzah* of Qum. With the ingress of Western philosophy into Iranian culture, Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'i—by drawing upon the Islamic philosophical tradition—initiated the first scholarly debates between the two. Some of his students include Shahīd Muṭahharī, Ayatullah Jawādī Āmulī, Ayatullah Ḥasanzādeh Āmulī, and Dr. Sayyid Hossein Nasr. His book *Shi'ah in Islam* was the outcome of discussions that took place between him and Professor Henri Corbin. His *Tafsīr al-Mizān*, in twenty volumes, is an excellent example of the type of response that Shi'i thought gives when faced with the questions and problems of the twentieth century. Some of his original and ground-breaking philosophical ideas can be found in his books: *Uṣūl e Falsafeh wa Rewesh e Reyālesm*, *Bidāyat al-Hikmah*, *Nihāyat al-Hikmah* and his marginal notes on the *Asfār* of Mullā Ṣadrā. His exegesis of the Qur'an, *al-Mizān*, has been translated into Persian and partially into English. *Bidāyat al-Hikmah* has been translated into English by Sayyid 'Alī Qūlī Qarā'i.
 48. Abu Naṣr Muḥammad al-Fārābī (870?-950), considered the founder of Islamic philosophy, he became known as the "second teacher", the first being Aristotle. Though he figured prominently in the choice of the intellectual elements of Hellenic thought that Islam would adopt, he was not just a transmitter of Greek philosophy. By way of original thought and penetrating metaphysical insights he attempted a synthesis of the opinions of Plato and Aristotle. In working out his own philosophical system, Fārābī attempted to detail the status of Revelation and explain its relation to the different levels of Intellect. In "practical philosophy"—or what might be called social science—he formulated the perfect state and wrote *Al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah*. His philosophical writings were usually short treatises on chosen topics. The Peripatetic, Illuminist, and

- Transcendental schools of philosophy in Islam can be said to be elaborations and developments of Fārābī's philosophy.
49. Ṣadr al-Dīn Shīrāzī (1571-1641), known as Mullā Ṣadrā, philosopher, *muḥaddith* (transmitter of traditions), and exegete who, drawing upon the Peripatetic and Illuminationist (*ishrāqī*) philosophical traditions and making full use of the mystical heritage of the Islamic world, inaugurated a synthesis and a new point of convergence in the history of Islamic philosophy. At a time when philosophy in the West strayed farther away from discussions on ontology and metaphysics (*mabāḥiṭ e wu-jūdī*) and, by so doing, laid the foundations of modern civilisation, Mullā Ṣadrā intensified Islamic philosophy's connection with these fields. He was the originator of the doctrine of transsubstantial motion (*ḥarakat al-jawhari*) and the belief that the soul was contingent in body and eternal in spirit. His school of philosophy came to be distinguished from the Peripatetic and the Illuminationist schools and, under the name of "Transcendental Philosophy" (*Ḥikmat al-Muta'aliyyah*), it slowly but surely gained wide acceptance. This school was particularly effectual in shaping the social and cultural movements inside Iran during the latter's initial contacts with the West. He was the author of more than fifty books. His *Asfār al-Arba'ah* and *Shawāhid al-Rubūbiyah* have become standard texts of philosophy. His other works include *Sharḥ Uṣūl al-Kāfi* and *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*.
 50. With the advent of Christianity, certain satanic forces were denied access to some of the heavens and worlds beyond this one. This reduced their powers and effectively weakened the belief in myths and gods.
 51. The German theologian and New Testament scholar Rudolf Bultmann (1884 - 1976), put forward the idea that modern Christianity must 'demythologise'—that is, rid itself of its non-historical, mythical concepts. His *Neues Testament und Mythologie* (New Testament and Mythology, 1941, English translation 1953) treats this matter in some detail. Tr.
 52. "The classical myths had caused serious problems for the Middle Ages. Their solution was either to characterize the pagan gods as devils, a method sanctioned by St Augustine, or to allegorise them as symbols of Christian ethics and morality, a method exemplified in the countless manuscripts of the work known as *Ovid Moralized*. Renaissance scholars inherited both these approaches and added something of their own." *Market House Books Encyclopaedia of the Renaissance*, 1987
 53. This is the same state that Plato describes in the *Republic* and corresponds to the *civitas Dei* of St. Augustine or *al-madīnat al-fāḍilah* of al-Fārābī.
 54. Sir Francis Bacon (1561-1626), lord chancellor of England (1618-21), English philosopher, essayist, courtier, jurist, and statesman. His writings include *The Advancement of Learning* (1605) and the *Novum Organum* (1620), in which he proposed a theory of scientific knowledge based on observation and experiment that came to be known as the inductive method.
 55. George Berkeley (1685-1753), Anglo-Irish Anglican bishop, philosopher, and scientist, best known for his Empiricist philosophy.

56. John Locke (1632-1704), English political and educational philosopher who laid the epistemological foundations of modern science. He was the initiator of the Age of Enlightenment and Reason in England and France, an inspirer of the U.S. Constitution, and is still a powerful influence on the life and thought of the West.
57. David Hume (1711-1776), Scottish philosopher, historian, economist, and essayist, known especially for his philosophical scepticism and empiricism, restricting human knowledge to the experience of ideas and impressions and denying the possibility of ultimately verifying their truth.
58. Sir Alfred Jules Ayer (1910-1989), British philosopher, who influenced the development of contemporary analytic philosophy. Ayer's book *Language, Truth, and Logic* (1936) was an influential expression of logical positivism. He maintained that all meaningful statements are either logical or empirical. According to his principle of verification, a statement is considered empirical only if some sensory observation is relevant to determining its truth or falseness. Statements that cannot be verified by experience were "nonsense," in his view—without philosophical significance.
59. The term "Pharaonism" was coined here to translate *tafarr'un*, which literally means, "to be like Pharaoh". In Qur'anic parlance and the popular culture of Islam, the Pharaoh represents the pinnacle of man's arrogance and disregard of the One God. "Promethean man" is perhaps the nearest equivalent to this term in Western literature. Tr.
60. Karl Marx (1818-1883), German philosopher, economist, historian and revolutionary. With the help of Friedrich Engels he wrote *The Communist Manifesto* (1848) and *Das Kapital* (1867-1894).
61. Auguste Comte (1798-1857), French philosopher known as the founder of positivism and sociology. Comte gave the science of sociology its name and established the new subject in a systematic fashion.
62. This is not to deny that there were certain omens of the arrival of humanism in the thoughts and writings of the ideologues of the 19th century. For instance, Marx in his doctoral dissertation writes, "Philosophy makes no secret of it. Prometheus' admission: 'In sooth all gods I hate,' is its own admission, its own motto against all gods, . . . Prometheus is the noblest saint and martyr in the calendar of philosophy". Tr.
63. Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679), English philosopher and political theorist, who wrote *Leviathan* (1651), which outlined his philosophy that men are fundamentally selfish. He set the scene for liberalism.
64. Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778), French philosopher and writer whose treatises and novels inspired the leaders of the French Revolution and the Romantic generation. His written works include *The Social Contract* and the novel *Emile* (both 1762). Rousseau was the least academic of modern philosophers and perhaps the most influential. His thought marked the end of the Age of Reason.
65. Charles Louis Montesquieu (1689-1755), French philosopher and jurist. An important figure of the early French Enlightenment.

ENDNOTES

66. Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900), German philosopher and critic of culture, who became one of the most influential of all modern thinkers. His attempts to unmask the motives that underlie conventional Western religion, morality, and philosophy deeply affected generations of philosophers, psychologists, poets, novelists, and playwrights. He thought through the consequences of the triumph of the Enlightenment's secularism, expressed in his observation that "God is dead," in a way that determined the agenda for many of Europe's most celebrated intellectuals after his death.
67. Jesus said, "And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free". John, 8:32
68. S.H. Nasr in *The Need for a Sacred Science*, echoes these sentiments when he writes "Humanism ... means ultimately substituting the Kingdom of Man for the Kingdom of God and making terrestrial man the ultimate and final arbitrator and judge of truth and himself the reality which is of the highest value.", p. 51, *ni*.
69. John Stuart Mill (1806-1873), British philosopher, economist, and exponent of Utilitarianism known especially for his interpretations of empiricism.
70. Sir Karl Raimund Popper (1902-1994), Austrian-born British philosopher of natural and social science who subscribed to "antideterminist" metaphysics, believing that knowledge evolves from experience of the mind.
71. Ludwig Andreas Feuerbach (1804-1872), German philosopher and humanist "theologian", whose major work, *The Essence of Christianity* (1841), maintains that religion and the divine are projections of human nature. Feuerbach also asserted that an individual's whole consciousness is the result of the interaction of sensory organs and the external world.
72. Max Weber (1864-1920), German sociologist and political economist known for his systematic approach to world history and the development of Western civilization. He related Protestantism to capitalism, and developed ideas on bureaucracy.

Glossary of Terms

<i>aḥadiyyah</i>	The Station of Divine Unity; the first order of Being below beyond-Being and the unknowable Essence.
<i>'ālam al-ṭabī'at</i>	The natural world.
<i>al-fāṭir</i>	The Originator.
<i>al-fayḍ</i>	The (Divine) Effusion.
<i>al-Ḥaq</i>	The Reality, the Absolute, the Truth.
<i>al-khāliq</i>	The Creator.
<i>arbāb al-anwā'</i>	Masters of Species.
<i>āyāt</i>	Signs, indicators, evidences (of God).
<i>āyāt al-takwīnī</i>	Ontological signs; signs in creation.
<i>'azlī</i>	Separative mode; distinctive.
<i>barzakh</i>	Isthmus.
<i>basīṭ</i>	Simple; non-composite.
<i>Bayt al-'Atīq</i>	The Free House, the Kaaba.
<i>dīn</i>	Religion; path, way; judgement.
<i>Du'ā</i>	Prayer.
<i>dunyā</i>	World, material realm; lower kingdom.
<i>fān</i>	Annihilated.
<i>fanā</i>	Annihilation.
<i>fanā al-istablākī</i>	Virtual annihilation; i.e. the virtual non-existence of something when it is existentially overpowered by a higher encompassing reality.
<i>faqīr</i>	Needy, poor.
<i>fāṭir</i>	Originator.
<i>fayḍ al-ilāhī</i>	Divine Effusion.
<i>fīrah</i>	Origination; original nature.
<i>fitrat Allah</i>	Origination of God; Creation of God.
<i>ghaṣlah</i>	Forgetfulness, oblivion.
<i>ghayb</i>	Unseen, hidden realm; metaphysical.
<i>ḥadīth</i>	Tradition, saying.
<i>ḥaqā'iq malakūtī</i>	Spiritual realities, celestial realities.
<i>ḥarakat al-jawharī</i>	Substantial motion; trans-substantial motion.
<i>ḥarām</i>	Forbidden, illicit, not allowed.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

<i>ḥarfī</i>	Prepositional.
<i>ḥashr</i>	Banishment; resurrection.
<i>ḥastī</i>	Existence, being.
<i>ḥaywānī</i>	Animalistic; lower, false.
<i>ḥikmat al-muta'aliyah</i>	Transcendental Philosophy; the name of Mullā Ṣadrā's school of philosophy.
<i>hubūt</i>	The Fall; decline.
<i>ḥudūrī</i>	Direct, by presence; without intermediary.
<i>ḥujjah</i>	Proof, authority, argument.
<i>ḥuṣūlī</i>	Acquired, by thought; conceptual.
<i>huwa lā huwa</i>	He, not He; i.e. mystical doctrine incorporating God's simultaneous transcendence and immanence.
<i>idāfah ishrāqī</i>	Illuminative relation, one-sided relation.
<i>idāfah maqūlī</i>	Correlation, bilateral relation.
<i>iḥāṭah</i>	Comprehension; in the meaning of an ontic encompassing and surrounding; scope.
<i>'ilm al-ḥudūrī</i>	Direct knowledge; knowledge by presence; intuitive knowledge.
<i>'irfān</i>	Mysticism; esotericism.
<i>'ishq al-'aṣfī</i>	Continent love; virtual love.
<i>'ishq majāzī</i>	Virtual love.
<i>ismī</i>	Substantive.
<i>jabarūt</i>	Invincible World; the realm of the Divine treasures, beyond the <i>mulk</i> and <i>malakūt</i> .
<i>jabarūtī</i>	Pertaining to the <i>jabarūt</i> .
<i>jihād</i>	Struggle; war.
<i>khalīfat Allah</i>	vicegerent of God
<i>khazā'in</i>	Treasure houses, stores, vaults; sources.
<i>khiyāl al-munfaṣil</i>	Detached imagination, discontinuous imagination; macrocosmic world of imagination.
<i>khiyāl al-muttaṣil</i>	Conjoined or contiguous imagination; microcosmic world of imagination.

<i>lawḥ al-maḥw wa al-ithbāt</i>	Tablet of Negation and Affirmation
<i>lawḥ maḥfūz</i>	Guarded Tablet; Divine Tablet; Preserved Tablet.
<i>ma'nawī</i>	Spiritual, supra-sensory; semantic.
<i>mādī</i>	Material; worldly.
<i>maḥbūb al-ḥaqīqī</i>	True beloved.
<i>maḥbūb al-kādhīb</i>	False beloved.
<i>maḥbūb al-majāzī</i>	Virtual beloved.
<i>maḥḍar</i>	Presence or locus (of manifestation).
<i>makrūh</i>	Disliked, disapproved of.
<i>maktab al-ishrāqī</i>	School of the Illuminationists; the philosophical school of Suhrawardī.
<i>malakat al-'ilmī</i>	Cognition; faculty of knowledge.
<i>malakūt</i>	Dominion, spiritual world; realm situated between the <i>jabarūt</i> and the <i>mulk</i> .
<i>malakūtī</i>	Pertaining to the <i>malakūt</i> ; celestial, spiritual.
<i>maskh</i>	Metamorphosis.
<i>mi'rāj</i>	Nocturnal Ascension; especially the nocturnal ascension of the Prophet Muḥammad to the Divine Throne.
<i>mithāl</i>	Imaginal.
<i>mubāḥ</i>	Allowed; neither liked nor disliked.
<i>muḥīṭ</i>	Comprehending, encompassing; governing.
<i>mulk</i>	Material or corporeal world; visible world; kingdom; lowest realm, subsumed under the <i>malakūt</i> and the <i>jabarūt</i> .
<i>muqayyid</i>	Conditioned; limited.
<i>mushṭaq</i>	Derivative; derived.
<i>mustaḥab</i>	Preferred, liked; favoured.
<i>muthul</i>	Ideas (Platonic), Forms; archetypes.
<i>nafs</i>	Soul.
<i>nafsānī</i>	Psychic.
<i>nafsī</i>	Absolute (as opposed to relative in the modalities of existence).

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

<i>nisbī</i>	Relative (as opposed to absolute in the modalities of existence).
<i>qaḍā</i>	Decree (Divine); pre-ordination.
<i>qadr</i>	Destiny; pre-destination.
<i>qāim bihi</i>	Subsisting by something; dependent.
<i>qiyāmat al-kubrā</i>	The Greater Resurrection.
<i>qiyāmat al-ṣuḡhrā</i>	The Lesser Resurrection.
<i>rabṭ</i>	Relation, nexus, connection.
<i>ribā</i>	Usury.
<i>riṣhwah</i>	Taking bribes.
<i>ṣalah</i>	Prayer; especially formally ordained and ritual prayer.
<i>ṣamad</i>	The Absolute; the Immovable; the Impenetrable; the Refuge; lit. a great invincible stone.
<i>shahādah</i>	Visible world, the seen and sensorial realm.
<i>sharī'ah</i>	Divine law; path; lit. the path that leads to water.
<i>shirk</i>	Polytheism; ascribing partners to God; denying <i>tawḥīd</i> .
<i>shuhūd 'aqlī</i>	Intellectual intuition; vision of the intellectual world and realities.
<i>shuhūdī</i>	By witnessing; intuitive; the visionary and direct apprehension of reality.
<i>ṣudūr</i>	Emanation; procession.
<i>ṭabī'at</i>	Nature, the natural and corporeal world.
<i>ṭāghūt</i>	Rebels; Satan's henchmen.
<i>tajāfī</i>	Displacement.
<i>tajallī</i>	Manifestation, epiphany; revelation; theophany, self-disclosure.
<i>tajasum al-'amāl</i>	Embodiment of deeds (in the <i>barzakh</i> and on the day of Resurrection).
<i>tamāyuz iḥāṭī</i>	Comprehensive distinction.
<i>tamāyuz wasfī</i>	Attributive distinction.
<i>tanabbuh</i>	Recollection, reminding; being made aware of something that is known but

<i>taqdīr</i>	has been forgotten.
<i>taṣdīqāt</i>	Determining; pre-ordination.
<i>tawāzun</i>	Confirmations; affirmations.
<i>tawḥīd</i>	Concordance.
	Absolute unity of God; monotheism;
	The fundamental principle and forte of
	the Islamic tradition. It includes the
	idea of the unicity of the Godhead as
	well as the principial unity of all Being
	in both its transcendental and imma-
	nent modalities.
<i>tawḥīd af'ālī</i>	Unity of Divine Acts.
<i>tawḥīdī</i>	Unitive; pertaining to <i>tawḥīd</i> .
<i>tutahhir</i>	Cleanse.
<i>tuzakkī</i>	Purify.
<i>'uqūl</i>	Intellects.
<i>'uraṣā</i>	Mystics; Masters of the esoteric realm.
<i>waḥdat al-ṣamadī</i>	Absolute unity; all-pervading unity.
<i>wāḥidiyyah</i>	The Station of Divine Unity; the sta-
	tion below <i>aḥadiyyah</i> in which the Di-
	vine Names and Attributes reside.
<i>wājib</i>	Obligatory, necessary.
<i>wujūdī</i>	Existential, ontological. Pertaining to
	concrete reality and being <i>qua</i> being, as
	opposed to conceptual and mental.
<i>yawm al-ba'th</i>	Resurrection Day.
<i>zakāh</i>	Poor-tax; alms.

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